THROUGH ONE ADMINISTRATION

BY THE AUTHOR OF

"THAT LASS O'LOWRIES"

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VOL. I.

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BY

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THROUGH ONE ADMINISTRATION.

CHAPTER I.

BERTHA'S GIRLHOOD.

EIGHT years before the Administration rendered important by the series of events and incidents which form the present story, there had come to Washington, on a farewell visit to a distant relative with whom he was rather a favourite, a young officer who was on the point of leaving the civilised world for a far-away Western military station. The name of the young officer was Philip Tredennis. His relative and entertainer was a certain well-known entomologist, whom it will be safe to call Professor Herrick. At the Smithsonian and in all scientific circles, Professor Herrick's name was a familiar one. He was considered

an enviable as well as an able man. He had established himself in Washington because he found men there whose tastes and pursuits were congenial with his own, and because the softness of the climate suited him; he was rich enough to be free from all anxiety and to enjoy the delightful liberty of pursuing his scientific labours because they were his pleasure, and not because he was dependent upon their results. He had a quiet and charming home, an excellent matter-of-fact wife, and one daughter, who was being educated in a Northern city, and who was said to be as bright and attractive as one could wish a young creature to be.

Of this daughter Tredennis had known very little, except that she enjoyed an existence and came home at long intervals for the holidays, when it did not happen that she was sent to the sea or the mountains with her mother instead.

The professor himself seemed to know but little of her. He was a quiet and intensely studious person, taking small interest in the ordinary world and appearing always slightly surprised when his wife spoke to him; still, his manner toward her was as gentle and

painstaking as if she had been the rarest possible beetle and the only one of her species to be found in any known collection, though perhaps the interest she awakened in him was not so great as it might have been under such exceptionally favourable circumstances. She was not a brilliant or far-seeing woman, and her opinions of entomology and, indeed, of science in general, were vague, and obscured by objections to small boxes, glass cases, long pins, and chloroform, and specimens of all orders.

So, observing this, Tredennis felt it not at all unnatural that he should not hear much of his daughter from the professor. Why his relative liked him, the young man was not at all sure, though at times he had felt the only solution of the mystery to be that he liked him because his tendency was towards silence and books and research of all kinds. He thought he was certain that the professor did like him. He had invited him to visit him in Washington, and had taken him to the Smithsonian and rambled from room to room with him, bestowing upon him tomes of information in the simplest and most natural manner; filled with the quietest interest himself and

entirely prepared to find his feeling shared by his charge. He had given into his hands the most treasured volumes in his library, and had even seemed pleased to have him seated near him when he sat at work. At all events, it was an established fact that a friendly feeling existed between them, and that if it had been his habit to refer to his daughter, he would have spoken of her to Tredennis. But Tredennis heard nothing of her until he had been some days in Washington, and then it was Mrs. Herrick who spoke of her.

"Nathan," she said one evening at dinner, "Bertha will be home on Tuesday."

The professor laid his spoon down as if he had rather unexpectedly discovered that he had had enough soup.

"Bertha," he said. "Indeed! Next Tuesday. Well, of course, we must be ready for her. Do you want any money, my dear? But of course you will want money when she comes, if she has finished school, as I think you said she had."

"I shall want money to pay her bills," answered Mrs. Herrick. "She will bring them with her. Her aunt has had her things made in New York."

"Yes," said the professor, "I dare say they will be more satisfactory. What kind of things, for instance, Catherine?"

"Dresses," replied Mrs. Herrick, "and things of that sort. You know she is to come out this season."

"To come out," remarked the professor, carefully giving the matter his undivided attention. "I hope she will enjoy it. What sort of a ceremony is it? And after a young person has 'come out' does she ever go in, and is there any particular pageant attached to such a—a contingency?"

"When she comes out," answered Mrs. Herrick, taking a purely practical view of the affair, "she begins to go to parties, to balls, and receptions, and lunches, which she does not do when she is going to school. It isn't considered proper, and it wouldn't give her any time for her studies. Bertha hasn't been allowed to go out at all. Her aunt Maria has been very particular about it, and she will enjoy things all the more because they are quite new to her. I dare say she will be very gay this winter. Washington is a very good place for a girl to come out in."

After dinner, when they retired to the

library together, it occurred to Tredennis that the professor was bestowing some thought upon his paternal position, and his first observation proved that this was the case.

"It is a most wonderful thing that a few brief years should make such changes," he said. "It seems impossible that so short a time should change a small and exceedingly red infant into a young person returned from school in the most complete condition, and ready to 'come out.' She was not interesting as an infant. I tried to find her so, but failed, though it was insisted that she was an unusually intelligent baby, and I have not seen much of her of late years. When she was growing, it was thought that the climate of Washington was not good for her. I am really a little curious about her. My views of girls are extremely undefined. I have always been a bookworm. I have not known girls. They have not come within my radius. I remember one I once knew years ago, but that is all. It was when I was a younger man. I think she was a year or so older than Bertha. She was very interesting—as a study. She used to bewilder me."

He walked over to the table and began to turn over some papers.

"She had gray eyes," he said, in a rather lower voice,—"gray eyes."

He was so quiet for some time that Tredennis thought he had forgotten what he had been talking about; but after a pause of at least three minutes, he spoke again.

"I would not be at all sorry," he said, "if Bertha was a little like her. I suppose," he added, referring seriously to Tredennis, "I suppose they are all more or less alike."

"I think——" faltered Tredennis, "perhaps so."

He did not feel himself an authority. The professor stood still a moment, regarding the fire abstractedly.

"*She* had gray eyes," he said again,—"gray eyes!" and immediately afterwards returned to his table, seated himself, and fell to work.

The next week Bertha arrived, and to her distant relative her arrival was a revelation. She descended upon the quiet household—with her trunks, her delight in their contents, her anticipation of her first season, her fresh and rather surprised exultation in her own small powers and charms, which were just

revealing themselves to her — like a young whirlwind. Her mother awakened to a most maternal interest in the gaieties into which she was to be drawn; the very servants were absorbed in the all-pervading excitement, which at length penetrated to the professor's study itself, and aroused him from his entomological reveries.

After she had been in the house a week, he began to examine the girl through his spectacles with great care and deliberation, and, having cheerfully submitted to this inspection through several meals, one day at dinner its object expressed herself with charming directness concerning it.

"I do hope you'll like me, papa," she said, "when you have classified me."

"Classified you!" said the professor, in some bewilderment.

"Yes," answered Bertha. "You know I always feel as if you might turn me over gently with your finger at any moment, and watch me carefully while I struggled until you knew all about me, and then chloroform me and stick a pin through me with a label on it. I shouldn't like the chloroform and the pin, but I should take an interest in the label.

Couldn't I have the label without the pin, papa?"

"I don't know," said the professor, examining her more carefully than ever. "I am afraid not."

After that it became his custom to encourage her to reveal herself in conversation, which it was very easy to do, as she was a recklessly candid young person, given to the most delightfully illogical partisanship, an endless variety of romantic fancies, and a vivid representation of all facts in which she felt interest. It must be confessed that, for the sake of hearing her talk, the professor somewhat neglected, for the time being, both *Coleoptera* and *Lepidoptera*, and, drifting into the sitting-room upon many sunny mornings, allowed himself to be surrounded by innocent frivolities in the way of personal adornments. And it must also be added that he fell into the habit of talking of the girl to Tredennis, as they sat together by the study fire at night.

"She is an attractive girl," he said once, seriously. "I find myself quite absorbed in her at times. She is chaotic, illogical, unpractical—oftener than not she does not know

anything of what she is talking about, but her very absurdities have a kind of cleverness in them. And wit—there is wit in her nonsense, though she is scarcely conscious of it. I cannot help thinking of her future, and what its needs will develop in her. It all depends upon the needs. You never know what will be developed, but you know it depends upon the needs."

"I—hope there will be no painful needs," said Tredennis, looking at the fire. "She is very happy. I never saw any one so happy."

"Yes, she's very happy," admitted the professor. "At present she is not much more than a joyous, perfectly healthy young animal. She sings and laughs because she can't help it, and she adorns herself from instinct. She'll be different in a year or two. She'll be less happy, but more interesting."

"More interesting!" said Tredennis, in a low voice.

"Yes, more interesting," answered the professor, looking at the fire himself, with an air of abstractedly following a train of thought. "She will have made discoveries about herself. It is a pity she can't make them without being less happy—but then, none of us are happy."

He paused, rubbed his forehead a second, and then turned suddenly on Tredennis.

"Are *you* happy?" he demanded. Tredennis started and hesitated.

"Y-yes—N-no," he answered, unsteadily. He would have said yes unreservedly a short time ago, but within the last few days he had been less sure of himself, and now, being confronted with the question unexpectedly, he found that he must answer with a reservation—though he could not at all have given a reason for the feeling that he must do so.

"Perhaps it is not my way to look at life brightly," he added.

"It is her way," said the professor. "She believes in everything in a persistent, childish fashion that is touching to older persons like myself. If you contest her points of belief with her, she is simply obstinate. You can't move her."

"Why should any one try?" said Tredennis, warmly.

"There is no need to try," responded the professor. "She will find out for herself."

"Why should she?" said Tredennis, warmer still. "I hope she won't."

The professor took off his spectacles and

began to polish them carefully with a corner of his large white handkerchief.

"She is going to be a clever woman," he said. "For her sake I am sorry to see it. She is going to be the kind of clever woman who has nine chances out of ten of being a desperate pain to herself while she is a pleasure to her friends. She hasn't the nature to find safety in cleverness. She has a conscience and emotions, and they will go against her."

"Against her?" cried Tredennis.

"She will make mistakes and suffer for them—instead of letting others suffer. She won't be a saint, but she might be a martyr. It always struck me that it took faults and follies to make a martyr."

He bent forward and poked the fire as carefully as he had rubbed his spectacles; then he turned to Tredennis again—slowly this time, instead of suddenly.

"You resent it all, I suppose," he said. "Of course you do. It makes you angry, I've no doubt. It would have made me angry, I dare say, at your age, to hear an elderly scientist dissect a pretty young creature and take the bloom off her life for her. It's natural."

"I don't like to think of her as—as being anything but happy—and—and good," said Tredennis, with some secret resentment.

"She'll not be bad," said the professor, critically. "It isn't in her. She might be happy, perhaps—if one thing happened to her."

"What one thing?" asked Tredennis.

"*If* she married a fine fellow, whom she was deeply and passionately in love with—which happens to very few women."

In the shadow of his corner, Tredennis felt the hot blood mount steadily to his forehead, and was glad of the dim light, for the professor was still regarding him fixedly, though as if in abstraction.

"She will be—likely to marry the man she loves, sir," he said, in a voice neither clear nor steady.

"Yes," said the professor; "unless she makes the mistake of merely marrying the man who loves *her*. She will meet him often enough. And if he chances some day to be a fascinating fellow, her fate will be sealed. That goes along with the rest of her strengths and weaknesses."

And he gave the fire a vigorous poke which

cast a glow of light upon them both; then, leaving his chair, he stood for a moment polishing his glasses,—staring absently at Tredennis before he put them on and wandered back to his table and his specimens.

Tredennis's own acquaintance with his young relative was not a very intimate one. Too many interests presented themselves on every side to allow of her devoting herself specially to any one, and her father's favourite scarcely took the form of an interest. She had not the leisure to discover that he was fully worth the discovering. She regarded him simply as a large and rather serious young man, who, without seeming stupid, listened rather than talked; and yet was not actually a brilliant listener, since he only listened with an air of observing quietly, and keeping the result of his observations to himself.

"I dare say it will suit him to be out among the Indians," she said to her mother upon one occasion. "And I should think it would suit the Indians. He won't find them frivolous and given up to vanity. I believe he thinks I am frivolous. It struck me that he did the other day, when I was talking about that new dress being made. Do you think

I talk about my clothes too much, mamma? Well, at all events," with much frankness, "I don't talk about them half as much as I think about them. I am always thinking about them just now. It seems as if I should die if they weren't becoming, after they were made. But don't you suppose it's natural, mamma, and that I shall get over it in time?"

She was brushing out her hair before the glass, and turned round, brush in hand, with an expression of rather alarmed interest, and repeated the question.

"Don't you think I shall get over it?" she said. "It seems just now as if everything had *begun* all at once, and anything might happen, and I had rather lost my breath a little in the rush of it. And I *do* so want to have a good time, and I care about everything connected with it—clothes, and people, and parties, and everything — but I *don't* want to be any more frivolous than I need be,—I mean I don't want to be a stupid."

She gave the pretty red-brown mane embowering her a little shake back, and fixed her large clear eyes on her mother's.

"I suppose all girls are frivolous just at first," she said. "Don't you?"

"I don't call it frivolous," said her mother, who was a simple, excellent creature, not troubled with intellectual pangs, and who, while she admired her, frequently found her daughter as far beyond her mild, limited comprehension as her husband was, and she was not at all disposed to complain thereat, either.

The one fact she was best able to grasp at this moment, was that the girl looked her best, and that the circumstance might be utilised as a hint for the future.

"That way of wearing your hair is very becoming to you, Bertha," she said. "I wish there was some way of managing it so as to get the same effect."

"But I can't wear it down after I'm 'out,'" said Bertha, reflectively. "I've got beyond that — as I suppose I shall get beyond the frivolity."

And she turned to the glass and looked at herself quite simply, and with a soft little air of seriousness which was very bewitching.

She regarded herself in this manner for several seconds, and then began slowly to dress her hair, plaiting it into soft thick plaits,

which she fastened closely and simply at the nape of her pretty neck.

"I believe I'll try not to be *quite* so frivolous," she said.

Perhaps she was making an effort at the accomplishment of this desirable end when she came down to dinner, an hour or so later. Tredennis thought he had never seen her so lovely.

He was standing alone in the fire-light, looking doubtfully at something he held in his hand, and she entered so quietly that he started on becoming conscious of her presence. She wore a dress he had not seen before, a pale grey, soft in material and very simply made, with a little lace kerchief knotted at her throat.

She came forward, and laid her hand on the back of a chair.

"Papa has not come in ——?" she began, then stopped suddenly, with a quick, graceful little turn of her head.

"Oh, where is the heliotrope?" she exclaimed.

For the room was full of the subtle fragrance of it.

He made a rather headlong step forward.

"It is here," he said. "I have been out, and I saw a lot of it in a florist's window. I don't know whether it's a flower to wear—and that sort of thing—but I always liked the odour of it. So I brought this home."

And he held it out to her.

She took it and buried her face in it delightedly. It was a sumptuous handful, and had been cut with unsparing lavishness. He had, in fact, stood by and seen it done.

"Ah, I like it so," she cried. "I do like it—it's lovely."

Then she lifted her face, hesitating a second as a new thought occurred to her. She looked up at him with pretty uncertainty, the colour rising in her cheeks simply because she was uncertain.

"They—I don't know ——" she said. "You didn't—they are not for ——"

"For you," Tredennis ended for her, hurriedly. "Yes. I don't know why, but I thought of you when I saw them. It's an idea, I suppose. They are for you, if you'll have them."

"Ah!" she said, "it was so kind of you! I'm so glad to have them. I have always liked them."

She almost hid her bright face in them again, while he stood and watched her, wondering why he felt suddenly tremulous and unreasonably happy.

At last she looked up at him again.

"I wish this was my 'coming out' night," she said. "I would wear these. You have given me my first bouquet. I am glad of that."

"If I am here on the night of your first party," he answered, "I will give you another, if you will let me."

"If you are here?" she said. "Are you going away?"

And there was an innocent, unconsciously expressed touch of disappointment in her tone, which was a sharp pleasure to him, though he was in too chaotic a mental condition to call it either pleasure or pain.

"I may be ordered away at any moment," he said.

He could never exactly remember afterwards how it came about, that in a few moments more he was sitting in the professor's arm-chair, and she had taken a seat on a hassock near him, with some of his heliotrope in the knot of her hair, some fastened against

her pale grey dress, and some loosely clasped in the hand which rested on her lap. He did not know how it happened, but she was there, and the scent of the heliotrope floated about her in the warmth of the fire, and she was talking in the bright, fanciful way which entertained the professor, and he knew that this brief moment he came for the first time within the charmed, bright circle of her girlish life and pleasures, and though he was conscious that his nearness moved her no more than the professor's would have done, he was content.

There was a softness in her manner which was new to him, and which had the effect of giving him courage. It was a result partly of the pleasure he had given her and partly of the good resolution she had made, of which he knew nothing. He only saw the result, and enjoyed it. She even showed a pretty interest in his future.

"She is what the Italians call *simpatica*," had been one of her father's observations concerning her, and Tredennis thought of it as he listened and watched her.

It was her gift to say well all she had to say. Her simplest speech produced its little effect, because all her heart was with her

hearer. Just now she thought only of Tredennis, and that she wished to show her innocent interest in him.

So she sat with her flowers upon her knee and talked, and it was an enchanted hour for Tredennis, who felt like a creature slowly awakening to the light of day.

"I suppose we may not see you again for several years," she said. "I do not like to think of that, and I am sure papa won't, but" —and she turned, smiling into his eyes, her chin resting in the hollow of her palm, her elbow on her knee—"when we *do* see you, of course you will be a most distinguished person, entirely covered with stars and ribbons and—scalps!"

"And you," he said; "I wonder what will have happened to you?"

"Oh, a great many things, of course," she answered, "but only the unimportant things that happen to all girls—though they will be important enough to me. I dare say I shall have had a lovely time, and have been very happy."

And she turned her little smile upon the fire and brooded for a few seconds—still in her pretty attitude.

It was such a pretty attitude and her look was so sweet that both together wrought upon Tredennis strongly, and he felt himself awakening a little more.

"I wish," he said, breaking the brief silence in a low voice, "I wish that *I* could insure the —happiness for you."

She turned, with a slight start, and some vague trouble in her face.

"Oh!" she said, "don't you think I shall be sure to be happy? There seems to be no reason why I should not. Oh, I hope I shall be happy; I—I don't know what I should do if I wasn't happy! I can't imagine it."

"Everybody is not happy," he said, his voice almost tremulous.

"But," she faltered, "but I—I have always been happy ——" She stopped, her eyes appealing to him piteously. "I suppose, after all, that is a poor reason," she added, "but it almost seems like one."

"I wish it were one!" he said. "Don't look like that. It—it hurts me. If any sacrifice of mine—any suffering——"

She stirred a little, moved in some vague way by the intensity of his tone, and as she

did so, the odour of the heliotrope floated towards him.

"Bertha —— !" he said, "Bertha —— "

He did not know what he would have said —and the words were never spoken—for at that moment the enchanted hour was ended. It was the professor himself who broke in upon it—the professor who opened the door and entered, hungry and absent-minded, the fire-light striking upon his spectacles and seeming to enlarge them tremendously as he turned his head from side to side, inhaling the air of the room with evident delight.

"Flowers, eh?" he said. "What kind of flowers? The air seems full of them."

Bertha rose and went to him, Tredennis watching her girlish pale-gray figure, as it moved across the room, with a pained and bewildered sense of having lost something which he might never regain.

"They are heliotropes," she said; "Philip brought them to me. It is my first bouquet, so I shall keep it until I am an old woman."

A week later, Tredennis left Washington. It so chanced that he took his departure on the night rendered eventful by the first party.

In the excitement attendant upon the preparations for this festivity, and for his own journey, he saw even less of Bertha than usual. When she appeared at the table, she was in such bright, high spirits that the professor found her—for some private reason of his own—more absorbing than ever. His spectacles followed her with an air of deep interest, he professed an untrained anxiety concerning the dress she was to wear, appearing to regard it as a scientific object worthy of attention.

"She's very happy!" he would say to Tredennis again and again. "She's very happy!" And having said it, he invariably rubbed his forehead abstractedly and pushed his spectacles a trifle awry, without appearing conscious of it.

When the carriage Tredennis had ordered came to the door at ten o'clock, the *coupé* which was to convey Bertha to the scene of her first triumphs had just driven up.

A few seconds later, Bertha turned from her mirror and took up her bouquet of white rose-buds and heliotrope, as a servant knocked at the door.

"The carriage is here, Miss," he said.

"And Mr. Tredennis is going away, and says would you come and let him say good-bye?"

In a few seconds more, Tredennis, who was standing in the hall, looked up from the carpet and saw her coming down the staircase with a little run, her white dress a cloud about her, her eyes shining like stars, the rose and heliotrope bouquet he had sent her in her hand.

"Thank you for it," she said, as soon as she reached him. "I shall keep this, too; and see what I have done." And she pushed a leaf aside and showed him a faded sprig of heliotrope hidden among the fresh flowers. "I thought I would like to have a little piece of it among the rest," she said. And she gave him her hand, with a smile both soft and bright.

"And you really kept it?" he said.

"Oh, yes," she answered simply. "You know I am going to keep it as long as I live. I wish we could keep you. I wish you were going with us."

"I am going in a different direction," he said. "And——" suddenly, "I have not a minute to spare. Good-bye."

A little shadow fell on the brightness of her face.

"I wish there was no such word as 'good-bye,'" she said.

There was a silence of a few seconds, in which her hand lay in his and their eyes rested on each other. Then Mrs. Herrick and the professor appeared.

"I believe," said Tredennis, "if you are going now, I will let you set out on your journey first. I should like to see—the last of you."

"But it isn't the last of me," said Bertha, "it is the first of me—the very first. And my heart is beating quite fast."

And she put her hand to the side of her slender white bodice, laughing a gay, sweet laugh with a thrill of excitement in it. And then they went out to the carriage, and when Mrs. Herrick had been assisted in, Bertha stood for a moment on the pavement—a bright, pure white figure, her flowers in her hand, the hall light shining upon her.

"Papa!" she called to the professor, who stood on the threshold. "I never asked you if you liked it—the dress, you know."

"Yes, child," said the professor. "Yes, child, I like—I like it."

And his voice shook a little, and he said

nothing more. And then Bertha got into the carriage and it drove away into the darkness. And almost immediately after, Tredennis found himself in his carriage, which drove away into the darkness, too—only, as he laid his head against the cushions and closed his eyes, he saw, just as he had seen a moment before, a bright, pure white figure standing upon the pavement, the night behind it, the great bouquet of white roses in its hand, and the light from the house streaming upon the radiant girl's face.

CHAPTER II.

TOO LATE.

THE eight years that followed were full of event for Tredennis. After the first two, his name began to be well known in military circles as that of a man bold, cool, and remarkable for a just clear-sightedness which set him somewhat apart from most men of his class and age. Stationed as he was in the midst of a hostile Indian country, full of perilous adventure, a twofold career opened itself before him. His nerve, courage, and physical endurance rendered him invaluable in time of danger, while his tendency to constant study of the problems surrounding him gave him in time of peace the distinction of being a thinking man, whose logically deduced and clearly stated opinions were continually of use to those whose positions

were more responsible than his own. He never fell into the ordinary idle routine of a frontier camp life. In his plain, soldierly quarters he worked hard, lived simply, and read much. During the first year he was rather desolate and unhappy. The weeks he had spent with the Herricks had been by no means the best preparation for his frontier experience, since they had revealed to him possibilities of existence such as he had given no thought to before. His youth had been rather rigorous and lonely, and his misfortune of reserve had prevented his forming any intimate friendships. His boyhood had been spent at boarding-school, his early manhood at West Point, and after that his life had settled itself into the usual wandering, homeless groove which must be the lot of an unmarried military man. The warm atmosphere of a long-established home, its agreeably unobtrusive routine which made the changes of morning, noon, and night all something pleasant to anticipate—the presence of the women who could not be separated in one's mind from the household itself—all these things were a sort of revelation to him. He had enjoyed them, and would have felt

some slight sadness in leaving them, even if he had not left something else also. It was a mere shadow he had left, but it was a shadow whose memory haunted him through many a long and lonely hour, and was all the more a trouble through its very vagueness. He was not the man likely to become the victim of a hopeless passion in three weeks. His was a nature to awaken slowly, but to awaken to such strength of feeling and to such power to suffer, at last, as would leave no alternative between happiness and stolidly borne despair. If fate decreed that the despair and not the happiness was to be his portion, it would be borne silently and with stern patience, but it would be despair nevertheless. As it was, he had been gradually aroused to a vague tenderness of feeling for the brightness and sweetness which had been before him day after day. Sometimes, during this first year of his loneliness, he wondered why he had not gone farther and reached the point of giving some expression to what he had felt, but he never did so without being convinced by his after reflections that such an effort would only have told against him.

"It wasn't the time," he said aloud to

himself, as he sat in his lonely room one night. "It wasn't the time."

He had been thinking of how she looked as she came to him that night, in her simple pale-grey dress, with the little lace kerchief tied round her throat. That, and his memory of the bright figure at the carriage-door, were pictures which had a habit of starting up before him now and again, though chiefly at such times as he was alone and rather feeling his isolation.

He remembered his own feeling at her girlish pleasure in his gift, the tone of her voice, her pretty attitude as she sat afterwards on the low seat near him, her chin resting in her hollowed palm, her smiling eyes uplifted to his. Her pretty, unstudied attitudes had often struck him, and this one lingered in his fancy as somehow belonging naturally to a man's dreams of a fireside.

"If the room and fireside were your own," he said, abstractedly, "you'd like——"

He stopped, and, rising to his feet, suddenly began to pace the room.

"But it wasn't the time," he said. "She would not have understood—I scarcely understood myself—and if we should ever meet

again, in all probability the time will have gone by."

After such thoughts he always betook himself to his books again with quite a fierce vigour, and in the rebound accomplished a great deal.

He gave a great deal of studious attention to the Indian question, and, in his determination to achieve practical knowledge, undertook more than one dangerous adventure. With those among the tribes whom it was possible to approach openly he made friends, studying their languages and establishing a reputation among them for honour and good faith, which was a useful element in matters of negotiation and treaty.

So it came about that his name was frequently mentioned in "the Department," and drifted into the newspapers, his opinions being quoted as opinions carrying weight, and, in an indirect way, the Herricks heard of him oftener than he heard of them, since there had been no regular exchange of letters between them, the professor being the poorest of correspondents. Occasionally, when he fell upon a newspaper paragraph commenting upon Tredennis's work and explaining some of his

theories, he was roused to writing him a letter of approval or argument, and at the close of such epistles he usually mentioned his daughter in a fashion peculiarly his own.

"Bertha is happier than ever," he said, the first winter. "Bertha is well, and is said to dance, in the most astonishingly attractive mànner, an astonishing number of times every evening. This I gather not only from her mother, but from certain elaborately ornamented cards they call programmes, which I sometimes find and study in private." This came the second winter; the third he said: "It dawns upon Bertha that she is certainly cleverer than the majority of her acquaintance. This at once charms and surprises her. She is careful not to obtrude the fact upon public notice, but it has been observed; and I find she has quite a little reputation 'in society' as an unusually bright and ready young creature, with a habit of being delightfully equal to any occasion. I gradually discover her to be full of subtleties, of which she is entirely unconscious."

Tredennis read this a number of times, and found food for reflection in it. He thought it over frequently during the winter, and out

of his pondering upon it grew a plan which began to unfold itself in his mind, rather vaguely at first, but afterwards more definitely. This plan was his intention to obtain leave of absence, and, having obtained it, to make his way at once to Washington.

He had thought at first of applying for it in the spring, but fate was against him. Difficulties which broke out between the settlers and certain hostile tribes called him into active service, and it was not until the severities of the next winter aided in quelling the disturbance by driving the Indians into shelter that he found himself free again.

It was late on New Year's Eve that he went to his quarters to write his application for furlough. He had been hard at work all day, and came in cold and tired, and pleased to find the room made cheerful by a great fire of logs, whose leaping flames brightened and warmed every corner. The mail had come in during his absence, and two or three letters lay upon the table with the Eastern papers, but he pushed them aside without opening them.

"I will look at them afterwards," he said. "This shall be done first—before the clock

strikes twelve. When the New Year comes in ——"

He paused, pen in hand, accidentally catching a glimpse of his face in the by no means flattering shaving-glass, which hung on the wall opposite. He saw himself brown with exposure, bearing marks of thought and responsibility his age did not warrant, and wearing even at this moment the rather stern and rigid expression which he had always felt vaguely to be his misfortune. Recognising it, his face relaxed into a half-smile.

"What a severe-looking fellow!" he said. "*That* must be improved upon. No one could stand that. It is against a man at the outset."

And the smile remained upon his face for at least ten seconds—at all events, until he had drawn his paper before him and begun to write. His task was soon completed. The letter written, he folded it, placed it in its envelope, and directed it, looking as immovable as ever, and yet conscious of being inwardly more moved than he had ever been before.

"Perhaps," he said, half-aloud, "*this* is the time, and it is well I waited."

And then he turned to the letters and papers awaiting him.

The papers he merely glanced over and laid aside; the letters he opened and read. There were four of them, three of them business epistles, soon disposed of; the sight of the handwriting upon the fourth made his heart bound suddenly—it was the clear, space-saving caligraphy of Professor Herrick, who labelled his envelopes as economically as if they had been entomological specimens.

"It's curious that it should have come now," Trendennis said, as he tore it open.

It was a characteristic letter, written, it appeared, with the object of convincing Tredennis that he had been guilty of a slight error in one of his statements concerning the sign-language of a certain tribe. It devoted five pages of closely-written paper to proofs and researches into the subject, and scientific reasons for the truth of all assertions made. It was clear, and by no means uninteresting. The professor never was uninteresting, and he was generally correct. Tredennis read his arguments carefully, and with respect, even with an occasional thrill, as he remembered how his communications usually terminated.

But this was an exception to the general rule. At the bottom of the fifth page he signed himself, "Your sincere friend, Nathan Herrick." And he had said nothing about Bertha.

"Not a word," said Tredennis. "He never did so before. What does it mean? Not a word!"

And he had scarcely finished speaking before he saw that on the back of the last page a postscript was written—a brief one, three words without comment, these: "Bertha is married."

For a few moments Tredennis sat still and stared at them. The glass across the room reflected very little change in his face. The immovable look became a trifle more immovable, if anything. There was scarcely the stirring of a muscle.

At length he moved slowly, folding the letter carefully and returning it to its envelope in exactly the folds it had lain in when he took it out. After that, he rose and began to pace the floor with a slow and heavy tread. Once he stopped and spoke, looking down at the boards beneath his feet.

"Bertha is married," he said, in a low,

hard voice. And the clock beginning to strike at the moment, he listened until it ended its stroke of twelve, and then spoke again:

"The New Year," he said, "and Bertha is married."

And he walked to the table where his letter of application lay, and, taking it up, tore it in two and tossed it into the fire.

Four years elapsed before he saw Washington, and in the four years he worked harder than before, added to his reputation year by year, and led the unsettled and wandering existence which his profession entailed. At rare intervals he heard from the professor, and once or twice in the course of his wanderings he met with Washingtonians who knew the family and gave him news of them. On one occasion, while in Chicago, he encountered at the house of an acquaintance a pretty and charming woman who had lived in Washington before her marriage, and, in the course of conversation, the fact that she had known the Herricks revealed itself. She appeared not only to have known but to have liked them, and really

brightened and warmed when they were mentioned.

"I was very fond of Bertha," she said, "and we knew each other as well as girls can know each other in the rush of a Washington winter. I was one of her bridesmaids when she was married. Did you know her well?"

And she regarded him with an additional touch of interest in her very lovely eyes.

"Not very well," Tredennis answered. "We are distantly related to each other, and I spent several weeks in her father's house just after her return from school; but I did not know her so well as I knew the professor."

"And you did not meet Mr. Amory?"

"There was no Mr. Amory then," was Tredennis's reply.

"Of course not," said Mrs. Sylvestre. "I might have known that if I had thought for a moment. He only appeared upon the scene the winter before they were married. She met him at a ball at the Mexican minister's, and his fate was sealed."

Tredennis was silent a moment. Then he asked a question.

"Did you know him well?" he said.

She reflected an instant, and then replied, smiling:

"He was too much in love for one's acquaintance with him to progress to any great extent. His condition was something like David Copperfield's when he said that he was 'saturated with Dora.' He was saturated with Bertha."

"They must be very happy," remarked Tredennis, and he did not know that he spoke in a hard and unresponsive tone, and that his face was more stern than was at all necessary.

"Naturally," responded Mrs. Sylvestre, calmly. "They have money, their children are charming, and their social position is unassailable. Bertha is very clever, and Mr. Amory admires her and is very indulgent. But he could scarcely help that. She is that kind of person."

"She?" repeated Tredennis.

Mrs. Sylvestre smiled again.

"Bertha," she replied. "People are always indulgent with her. She is one of those fortunate persons who are born without any tendency to demand, and who consequently

have everything given to them without the trouble of having a struggle. She has a pretty, soft sort of way, and people stand aside before it. Before I knew her well, I used to think it was simply cleverness."

"Wasn't it?" said Tredennis.

"Not quite. It escapes that by being constitutional amiability and grace—but if it wasn't constitutional amiability and grace it would be cleverness, and you would resent it. As it is, you like her for it. She is pretty and charming, and has her little world at her feet, and yet her manner is such that you find yourself wondering if she even suspects it."

"Does she?" asked Tredennis.

Mrs. Sylvestre turned her attention to the other side of the room.

"There is Mr. Sylvestre," she said, serenely. "He is coming to us. You must know each other."

And then Mr. Sylvestre sauntered up. He was a very handsome man, with a rather languid air, which remotely suggested that if he took off his manners and folded them away he would reveal the unadorned fact that he was bored. But even he bestirred himself a little

when Tredennis's relationship to the Herricks was mentioned.

"What!" he said. "You are Mrs. Amory's cousin?"

"Only third or fourth," responded Tredennis.

"By Jove! You're in luck!" his new acquaintance returned. "Third or fourth is near enough. I wouldn't object to sixth, myself. Do you see her often?"

"I have not seen her for seven years."

Mr. Sylvestre bestowed a critical glance upon him.

"What's the matter with you?" he inquired, languidly. "There's something radically wrong about a man who neglects his opportunities in that way." He paused and smiled, showing his white teeth through his moustache. "Oh, she's a clever little dev——" He pulled himself up with remarkable adroitness. "She's very clever," he said. "She's delightfully clever."

"She must be," commented Tredennis, unenthusiastically. "I never hear her mentioned without its being added that she is very clever."

"You would be likely to find the thing out

for yourself when you met her—even if you hadn't heard it," said Mr. Sylvestre.

When Tredennis returned to his room that night, he sat down to read, deliberately choosing a complicated work which demanded the undivided attention of the peruser. He sat before it for half an hour, with bent brow and unyielding demeanour, but at the end of that time he pushed it aside, left his seat, and began to pace the floor, and so walked with a gloomy face until it was long past midnight, when he put out the light and went to bed.

CHAPTER III.

EIGHT YEARS AFTERWARDS.

Two years later, he found himself, one evening in March, driving down Pennsylvania Avenue in a musty hack, which might have been the very one which had borne him to the depot the night he had seen the last of Bertha and her white roses. But the streets were gayer now than they had been then. He had arrived only a day or so after the occurrence of an event of no less national importance than the inauguration of a newly-elected President, and there still remained traces of the festivities attendant upon this ceremony, in the shape of unremoved decorations fluttering from windows, draping doors, and swaying in lines across the streets. Groups of people, wearing a rather fatigued air of having remained after the feast for the purpose of more extended

sight-seeing, gave the sidewalks a well-filled look, and here and there among them was to be seen a belated uniform which had figured effectively in the procession to the Capitol two days before.

Having taken note of these things, Tredennis leaned back upon his musty cushions with a half-sigh of weariness.

"I come in with the Administration," he said. "I wonder if I shall go out with it, and what will have happened in the interval."

He was thinking of his past and what it had paid him. He had set out in his early manhood with the fixed intention of making for himself a place in the world in which he might feel a reasonable amount of pride. He had attained every object he had aimed at, with the knowledge that he had given for every such object its due value in labour, persistent effort, and steadiness of purpose. No man of his age stood higher in his profession than he did—very few as high. He had earned distinction, honour, and not a little applause. He had found himself "a lion" on more than one occasion, and though he had not particularly enjoyed the experience, had

not undervalued it as an experience. The world had used him well, and if he had been given to forming intimacies, he might have had many friends. His natural tendency to silence and reserve had worked against him in this, but as it was, he had no enemies and many well-wishers. It was not his habit to bemoan even in secret his rather isolated life; there were times when he told himself that no other would suit him so well, but there were also times when he recognised that it *was* isolated, and the recognition was one which at such moments he roused all the force of his nature to shut out of his mind as soon as possible. He had, perhaps, never fully known the influence his one vague dream had had upon his life. When it ended, he made a steady effort to adjust himself to the new condition of existing without it, and had learned much of the strength of its power over him by the strength of the endeavour it had cost him. His inward thought was that if there had been a little more to remember the memory might have been less sad. As it was, the forgetting was a slow, vague pain, which he felt indefinitely long after he thought that it had died away. He put the old

drifting fancies out of his mind, and having no leaning towards self-indulgence, believed at last that they were done with because they returned but seldom, but he never heard of Bertha, either through the professor or through others, without being conscious for days afterwards of an unrest he called by no name.

He rested under the influence of this feeling as he was driven through the lighted streets towards his hotel, and his recollection of his last drive through these same streets made it stronger.

"Eight years," he said. "She has been to many parties since then. Let us hope she has enjoyed them all."

He made his first visit to the professor the same evening, after he had established himself in his room and dined. The professor was always at home in the evening, and, irregular as their correspondence had been, Tredennis felt that he was sure of a welcome from him.

He was not mistaken in this. He found his welcome.

The professor was seated in his dressing-gown, before his study table, as if he had not stirred during the eight years. He had even

the appearance of being upon the point of impaling the same corpulent beetle upon the same attenuated pin, and of engaging in the occupation with the same scientific interest Tredennis remembered so well.

On hearing his visitor's name announced, he started slightly, laid his beetle aside with care, and rising from his seat, came forward with warm pleasure in his face.

"What!" he exclaimed. "What! *You*, Tredennis! Well, well! I'm very glad, my dear fellow! I'm very glad."

He shook his hand affectionately, at the same time holding him by the shoulder, as if to make more sure of him.

"I am very glad myself," said Tredennis. "It is a great pleasure to see you again."

"And it took you eight years to get round to us," said the professor, looking at him thoughtfully, and turning him round a trifle more to the light. "Eight years! That's a slice out of a man's life, too."

"But you are no older, professor," said Tredennis. "I am older, but not you."

The professor nodded acquiescence.

"Yes, yes, I know all about that," he said. "You're an old fellow, now; I was an old

fellow myself forty years ago. There, sit down, and tell me all about it. That is the chair you sat in when you were here last. You sat in it the night—the night we talked about Bertha."

CHAPTER IV

MEETING AGAIN.

"How is Bertha?" Tredennis asked.

The professor sat down in his chair and took up the poker quite carefully.

"She is at a party to-night," he said, poking the fire, "though it is late in the season for parties. She generally is at a party—oftener than not she is at two or three parties."

"Then she must be well," suggested Tredennis.

"Oh, she is well," the professor answered. "And she gets a good deal out of life. She will always get a good deal out of it—in one way or another."

"That is a good thing," remarked Tredennis.

"Very," responded the professor, "if it's all in the one way and not in the other."

He changed the subject almost immediately,

and began to discuss Tredennis's own affairs. His kindly interest in his career touched the younger man's heart. It seemed that he had taken an interest in him from the first, and, silent as he had been, had never lost sight of him.

"It used to strike me that you would be likely to make something of your life," he said in his quiet, half-abstracted way. "You looked like it. I used to say to myself that if you were my son I should look forward to being proud of you. I—I wish you *had* been my son, my boy."

"If I had been," answered Tredennis, earnestly, "I should have felt it a reason for aiming high."

The professor smiled faintly.

"Well," he said, "you aimed high without that incentive. And the best of it is that you have not failed. You are a strong fellow. I like—a—strong—fellow," he added, slowly.

He spoke of Bertha occasionally again in the course of their after conversation, but not as it had been his habit to speak of her in her girlhood. His references to her were mostly statements of facts connected with her children, her mode of life, or her household. She

lived near him, her home was an attractive one, and her children were handsome, healthy, and bright.

"Amory is a bright fellow, and a handsome fellow," he said. "He is not very robust, but he is an attractive creature—sensitive, poetic temperament, fanciful. He is fanciful about Bertha, and given to admiring her."

When he went away at the end of the evening, Tredennis carried with him the old vague sense of discomfort. The professor had been interesting and conversational, and had given him the warmest of welcomes, but he had missed something from their talk which he had expected to find. He was not aware of how he had counted upon it until he missed it, and the sense of loss which he experienced was a trouble to him.

He had certainly not been conscious of holding Bertha foremost in his mind when he had turned his steps towards her father's house. He had thought of how his old friend would look, of what he would say, and had wondered if he should find him changed. He had not asked himself if he should see Bertha or hear of her, and yet what he had missed in her father's friendly talk had been the old kindly,

interested discussion of her, and once out in the night air and the deserted streets he knew that he was sadder for his visit than he had fancied he should be. The bright, happy, girlish figure seemed to have passed out of the professor's life also—out of the home it had adorned—even out of the world itself. His night's sleep was not a very peaceful one, but the next morning when he rose, the light of day and the stir of life around him seemed to have dispelled the reality of his last night's fancies. His mind had resolved itself into a condition with which he was familiar, and he was aroused to interest and pleasure in his surroundings. His memory was once more the ghost of a memory which he had long accustomed himself to living without. During the morning, his time was fully occupied by his preparations for his new duties, but in the afternoon he was at liberty, and remembering a message he was commissioned to deliver to the sister of a brother officer, he found his way to the lady's house.

It was a house in a fashionable street, and its mistress was a fashionable little person who appeared delighted to see him, and to treat him with great cordiality.

"I am so glad you were so good as to call to-day," she said. "Mr. Gardner heard that you had arrived, but did not know where you were, or he would have seen you this morning. What a pity that you were not in time for the inauguration! The ball was more than usually successful. I do hope you will let us see you to-night."

"To-night?" repeated Tredennis.

"Yes. We want you so much," she continued. "We give a little party,—only a little one,—and we shall be so glad. There will be several people here who will be delighted to meet you,—the gentleman who is spoken of as likely to be the new Secretary of the Interior, for instance. He will be charmed. Mr. Gardner has told me what interesting things you have been doing, and what adventures you have had. I shall feel quite sure that my party will be a success, if you will consent to be my lion."

"I am afraid my consenting wouldn't establish the fact," said Tredennis. "You would want a mane, and a roar, and claws. But you are very kind to ask me to your party."

The end of the matter was that, after some

exchange of civilities, he gave a half-promise to appear, mentally reserving the privilege of sending "regrets" if he did not feel equal to the effort when night arrived. He was not fond of parties. And so, having delivered the message with which he had been commissioned, he made his adieux and retired.

When night came, he was rather surprised to find lurking in his mind some slight inclination to abide by his promise. Accordingly, after having taken a deliberate, late dinner, read the papers, and written a letter or so, he dressed himself and issued forth.

On arriving at his destination, he found the "little party" a large one. The street was crowded with carriages, the house was brilliantly lighted, an awning extended from the door to the edge of the pavement, and each carriage, depositing its brilliant burden within the protection of the striped tunnel, drove rapidly away to give place to another.

Obeying the injunctions of the servant at the door, Tredennis mounted to the second story and divested himself of his overcoat, with the assistance of a smart mulatto who took it in charge. The room in which he found himself was rather inconveniently

crowded with men — young, middle-aged, elderly, some of them wearing a depressed air of wishing themselves at home, some bearing themselves stolidly, and others either quietly resigned or appearing to enjoy themselves greatly. It was not always the younger ones who formed this last class, Tredennis observed. In one corner a brisk gentleman with well-brushed, grey beard laughed delightedly over a story just related to him with much sprightliness by a companion a decade older than himself, while near them an unsmiling youth of twenty regarded their ecstasies without the movement of a muscle.

Tredennis's attention was attracted for a moment towards two men who stood near him, evidently awaiting the appearance of some one at the door of the ladies' cloak-room, which they could see from where they stood.

One of them leaned in a nicely managed labour-saving attitude against the door-post. He was a rather tall, blonde young man, with a face eminently calculated to express either a great deal or absolutely nothing at all, as he chose to permit it, and his unobtrusive evening dress had an air of very agreeable fitness and neatness, and quite distinguished itself by

seeming to belong to him. It was his laugh which called Tredennis's attention to him. He laughed in response to some remark of his companion's—a non-committal but naturally sounding baritone laugh, which was not without its attractiveness.

"Yes, I was there," he said.

"And sang?"

"No, thank you."

"And she was there, of course?"

"She?" repeated his friend, his countenance at this moment expressing nothing whatever, and doing it very well.

"Oh, Mrs. Amory," responded the other, who was young enough and in sufficiently high spirits to be led into forgetting to combine good taste with his hilarity.

"You might say Mrs. Amory—if you don't object," replied his companion, quietly. "It would be more civil."

Then Tredennis passed out and heard no more.

He made his way down the stairs, which were crowded with guests going down and coming up, and presented himself at the door of the first of the double parlours, where he saw his hostess standing with her husband.

Here he was received with the greatest warmth. Mrs. Gardner brightening visibly when she caught sight of him.

"Now," she said, "this is really good of you. I was almost afraid to let you go away this afternoon. Mr. Gardner, Colonel Tredennis is really here," she added, with frank cordiality.

After that, Tredennis found himself swallowed, as in a maëlstrom. He was introduced right and left, hearing a name here and seeing a face there, and always conscious of attaching the wrong names to the faces as he struggled to retain some impression of both in his memory. Mrs. Gardner bore him onward, filled with the most amiable and hospitable delight in the sensation he awakened as she led him towards the prominent official in prospective before referred to, who leaned against a mantel-piece and beguiled his time by making himself quite agreeable to a very pretty young *débutante* who was recounting her experience at the inaugural ball. Here Tredennis was allowed to free himself from the maëlstrom and let it whirl past him, as he stood a little aside and conversed with his new acquaintance, who showed deep interest in and much

appreciation of all he had to say, and evidently would have been glad to prolong the interview beyond the moment, when some polite exigency called him away in the midst of an animated discussion of the rights of Indian agents and settlers.

When he had gone, Tredennis still remained standing where he had left him, enjoying his temporary seclusion and the opportunity of looking on with the cool speculation of an outsider.

He had been looking on thus for some moments,—at the passing to and fro, at the well-bred elbowing through the crush, at the groups gathering themselves here and there to exchange greetings and then breaking apart and drifting away,—when he suddenly became aware of a faint fragrance in the atmosphere about him which impressed itself upon him with a curious insistence. On his first vague recognition of its presence he could not have told what it was, or why it roused in him something nearer pain than pleasure. It awakened in him a queer sense of impatience with the glare of light, the confusion of movement and voices, and the gay measure of the music in the next room. And almost the

instant he felt this impatience, a flash of recognition broke upon him, and he knew what the perfume was, and that it seemed out of place in the glare and confusion simply because his one distinct memory of it associated itself only with the night when he had sat in the firelight with Bertha, and she had held the heliotrope in her hand. With this memory in his mind, and with a half-smile at his own momentary resentment of the conditions surrounding him, he turned towards the spot near him from which he fancied the odour of the flowers came, thinking that it had floated from some floral decoration of the deep window. And so, turning, he saw—surrounded by what seemed to be the gayest group in the room—Bertha herself!

She was exquisitely dressed, and stood in the prettiest possible pose, supporting herself lightly against the side of the window; she had a bouquet in her hand and a brilliant smile on her lips, and Tredennis knew in an instant that she had seen and recognised him.

She did not move—she simply retained her pretty pose, smiling and waiting for him to come to her, and, though she said nothing to her companions, something in her smile

evidently revealed the situation to them, for, almost immediately, the circle divided itself, and room was made for him to advance within it.

Often afterwards Tredennis tried to remember how he moved towards her, and what he said when he found himself quite near her, holding the pretty, gloved hand she gave him so lightly, but his recollections were always of the vaguest. There scarcely seemed to have been any first words—he was at her side, she gave him her hand, and then, in the most natural manner, the group about her seemed to melt away, and they were left together; and he, glancing half-unconsciously down at her bouquet, saw that it was made of heliotrope and Maréchal Niel roses.

She was so greatly and yet so little changed that he felt, as he looked at her, like a man in a dream. He tried to analyse the change and could not, and the effort to do so was a pain to him. The colour in her cheeks was less bright than he remembered it, but her eyes were brighter; he thought also that they looked larger, and soon recognised that this was not only because her face was less girlishly full, but arose from a certain alertness of

expression which had established itself in them. And yet, despite their clear brightness, when she lifted them to his own, his sense of loss was for the instant terrible. Her slight, rounded figure was even prettier than ever —more erect, better borne, and with a delicate consciousness and utilising of its own graces—but it was less easy to connect it mentally with the little grey gown and lace kerchief than he could ever have believed possible.

Her very smile and voice had changed. The smile was sometimes a very brilliant one and sometimes soft and slow, as if a hidden meaning lay behind it; the voice was low-pitched, charmingly modulated, and expressed far more than the words it gave to a listener, but Tredennis knew that he must learn to know them both, and that to do so would take time and effort.

He never felt this so strongly as when she sat down on the cushioned window-seat, and made a little gesture towards the place at her side.

"Sit down," she said, with the soft smile this time—a smile at once sweet and careless. "Sit down, and tell me if you are glad to be

stationed in Washington; and let me tell *you* that papa is delighted at the prospect of your being near him again."

"Thank you," answered Tredennis; "and as to the being here, I think I like the idea of the change well enough."

"You will find it a great change, I dare say," she went on, "though, of course, you have not devoted yourself to the Indians entirely during your absence. But Washington is unlike any other American city. I think it is unlike any other city in the universe. It is an absorbingly interesting place when you get used to it."

"You are fortunate in finding it so," said Tredennis.

"I?" she said lightly. "Oh! I do not think I could resign myself to living anywhere else; though, when you reflect, of course you know that is a national quality. All good Americans adore the city they confer distinction on by living in, and asperse the characters of all other places. Englishmen believe in London, and Frenchmen in Paris; but in America, a New-Yorker vaunts himself upon New York, a Bostonian glories in Boston, and a Washingtonian delights in the capital of

his country; and so on until you reach New Orleans."

"That is true enough," said Tredennis, "though I had not thought of it before."

"Oh, it is true," she answered, with an airy laugh. Then she added, with a change of tone, "You have been away for a long time."

"Eight years," he replied.

He thought she gave a slight start, but immediately she turned upon him with one of the brilliant smiles.

"We have had time to grow since then," she said,—"not older, of course, but infinitely wiser—and better."

He did not find it easy to comprehend very clearly either her smile or her manner. He felt that there might be something hidden behind both, though certainly nothing could have been brighter or more inconsequent than her tone. He did not smile, but regarded her for a moment with a look of steady interest, of which he was scarcely conscious. She bore it for an instant, and then turned her eyes carelessly aside, with a laugh.

"I do not think you are changed at all," she said.

"Why?" he asked, still watching her, and trying to adjust himself to her words.

"You looked at me then," she said, "just as you used to when you were with us before, and I said something frivolous. I am afraid I was often frivolous in those days. I confess I suspected myself of it, and one day I even made a resolution——"

She did start then—as if some memory had suddenly returned to her. She lifted her bouquet to her face and let it slowly drop upon her knee again as she turned and looked at him.

"I remember now," she said, "that I made that resolution the day you brought me the heliotrope." And now it seeemed for the instant to be her turn to regard him with interest.

"I don't know what the resolution was," he said, rather grimly, "but I hope it was a good one. Did you keep it?"

"No," she answered, undisturbedly, "but I kept the heliotrope. You know I said I would. It is laid away in one of my bureau drawers."

"And the first party?" he asked. "Was it a success?"

"Oh, yes," she replied, "it was a great success. I am happy to say that all my parties are successes, inasmuch as I enjoy them."

"Is this a success?" he inquired. She raised her bouquet to her face again and glanced over it at the crowded room.

"It is an immense success," she said. "Such things always are—in Washington. Do you see that little woman on the sofa? Notice what bright eyes she has, and how quickly they move from one person to another—like a bird's. She is our 'Washington correspondent' for half a dozen Western papers, and 'does the social column' in one of our principal dailies, and to-morrow you will read in it that 'One of the most brilliant receptions of the season was held last night at the charming home of Mrs. Winter Gardner, on K street.' You will also learn that 'Mrs. Richard Amory was lovely in white brocade and pearls,' and that 'noticeable among even the stateliest masculine forms was the imposing figure of Colonel Tredennis, the hero of Indian adventure and ——'"

She had been speaking in the quietest possible manner, looking at the scene before

her and not at him, but here she stopped and bent towards him a little.

"Have you," she said softly, "such a thing as a scalp about you?"

He was by no means prepared for the inquiry, but he sustained himself under it in his usual immovable manner. He put his hand up to his breast and then dropped it.

"I am afraid not," he said. "Not in this suit. I forgot, in dressing, that I might need them. But I might go back to the hotel," he added suggestively.

"Oh, no, thanks," she said, returning to her former position. "I was only thinking how pleased she would be if you could show her a little one, and tell her the history of it. It would be so useful to her."

"I am very sorry," said Tredennis.

"You would be more sorry," she went on, "if you knew what an industrious little person she is, and with what difficulty she earns her ten dollars a column. She goes to receptions, and literary and art clubs, and to the White House, and the Capitol, and knows everybody and just what adjectives they like, and how many; and is never ill-natured at all, though it really seems to me that such an existence

offers a premium to spitefulness. I am convinced that it would make me spiteful. But she never loses control over her temper —or her adjectives. If I weighed two hundred pounds, for instance, she would refer to my avoirdupois as 'matronly *embonpoint*,' and if I were a skeleton, she would say I had a 'slight and reed-like figure,' which is rather clever, you know, as well as being Christian charity."

"And she will inform the world to-morrow that your dress," glancing down at it, "was white——"

"And that my hair was brown, as usual," she ended for him. "And that I carried a bouquet of heliotrope and roses."

"I hope you like it," he said.

"Oh, very much indeed, thank you," was her response. "And if I did not, somebody else would, or it is plain that she would not get her ten dollars a column. It has struck me that she doesn't do it for amusement, or with the deliberate intention of annoying people. For my part, I admire and envy her. There is no collection so valuable as a collection of adjectives. Everything depends on adjectives. You can begin a

friendship or end it with one—or an enmity, either."

"Will you tell me," said Tredennis, "what adjective you would apply to the blonde young man on the other side of the room, who has just picked up a lady's handkerchief?"

She looked across the room at the person indicated, and did not reply at once. There was a faintly reflective smile in her eyes, though it could scarcely be said to touch her lips. The man was the one who had attracted Tredennis's attention at the door of the cloak-room, and since coming down stairs he had regarded him with some interest upon each occasion when he had caught sight of him as he moved from room to room, evidently at once paying unobtrusive but unswerving attention to the social exigencies of his position, and finding a decent amount of quiet entertainment in the results of his efforts.

"I wish you would tell me," said Bertha after her little pause, "what adjective *you* would apply to him."

"I am afraid," said Tredennis, "that our acquaintance is too limited at present to allow of my grasping the subject. As I don't chance to know him at all——"

Bertha interposed, still watching the object of discussion with the faintly reflective smile.

"I have known him for six years," she said, "and I have not found his adjective yet. He is a cousin of Mr. Amory's. Suppose," she said, turning with perfect seriousness and making a slight movement as if she would rise, "suppose we go and ask Miss Jessup?"

Tredennis offered her his arm.

"Let us hope that Miss Jessup can tell us," he said.

His imperturbable readiness seemed to please her. Her little laugh had a genuine sound. She sat down again.

"I am afraid she could not," she said. "See! he is coming to speak to me, and we might ask him."

But she did not ask him when he presented himself before her, as he did almost immediately. He had come to remind her that dancing was going on in one of the rooms, and that she had promised him the waltz the musicians had just struck into with a flourish.

"Perhaps you will remember that you said the third waltz," he said, "and this is the third waltz."

Bertha rose.

"I remember," she said, "and I think I am ready for it; but before you take me away you must know Colonel Tredennis. Of course you do know Colonel Tredennis, but you must know him better. Colonel Tredennis, this is Mr. Arbuthnot."

The pair bowed, as civility demanded. Of the two, it must be confessed that Tredennis's recognition of the ceremony was the less cordial. Just for the moment, he was conscious of feeling secretly repelled by the young man's well carried, conventional figure and calm, blonde countenance,—the figure seemed so correct a copy of a score of others, the blonde countenance expressed so little beyond a carefully trained tendency to good manners, entirely unbiased by any human emotion.

"By the time our waltz is finished," said Bertha, as she took his arm, "I hope that Mr. Amory will be here. He promised me that he would come in towards the end of the evening. He will be very glad to find you here."

And then, with a little bow to Tredennis, she went away.

She did not speak to her companion until

they reached the room where the dancers were congregated. Then, as they took their place among the waltzers, she broke the silence.

"If I don't dance well," she said, "take into consideration the fact that I have just been conversing with a man I knew eight years ago."

"You will be sure to dance well," said Arbuthnot, as they began. "But I don't mind acknowledging an objection to persons I knew eight years ago. I never could find any sufficient reason for their turning up. And, as to your friend, it strikes me it shows a great lack of taste in the Indians to have consented to part with him. It appeared to me that he possessed a manner calculated to endear him to aboriginal society beyond measure."

Bertha laughed—a laugh whose faintness might have arisen from her rapid motion.

"He's rather rigorous-looking," she said, "but he always was. Still, I remember I was beginning to like him quite well when he went West. Papa is very fond of him. He turns out to be a persistent, heroic kind of being—with a purpose in life, and the rest of it."

"His size is heroic enough," said Arbuthnot. "He would look better on a pedestal in a public square than in a parlour."

Bertha made no reply, but after having made the round of the room twice. she stopped.

"I am not dancing well," she said, "I do not think I am in a dancing mood. I will sit down."

Arbuthnot glanced at her and then looked away.

"Do you want to be quiet?" he asked.

"I want to be quieter than this," she answered; "for a few minutes. I believe I am tired."

"You have been going out too much," he said, as he led her into a small side-room which had been given up to a large, ornate punch-bowl, to do reverence to which occasional devotees wandered in and out.

"I have been going out a great deal," she answered.

She leaned back in the luxurious little chair he had given her, and looked across the hall into the room where the waltz was at its height, and, having looked, she laughed.

"Do you see that girl in the white dress,

which doesn't fit," she said,—"the plump girl who bags at the waist and is oblivious to it—and everything else but her waltz and her partner ?"

"Yes," he responded, "but I hope you are not laughing at her—there is no need of it—she is having a fascinating time."

"Yes," she returned. "She is having a lovely time. And I am not laughing at her, but of what she reminds me of. Do you know I was just that age when Colonel Tredennis saw me last. I was not that size or that shape, and my dresses used to fit,—but I was just that age, and just as oblivious, and danced with just that spirit of enjoyment."

"You dance with just as much enjoyment now," said Arbuthnot, "and you are quite as oblivious at times, though it may suit your fancy just at the present moment to regard yourself as a shattered wreck confronted with the ruins of your lost youth and innocence. I revel in that kind of thing myself at intervals, but it does not last."

"No," she said, opening her fan with a smile, and looking down at the Cupids and butterflies adorning it, "of course, it won't last, and I must confess that I am not

ordinarily given to it—but that man! Do you know it was a curious sort of sensation that came over me when I first saw him. I was standing near a window, talking to half-a-dozen people, and really enjoying myself very much,—you know I nearly always enjoy myself,—and suddenly something seemed to make me look up—and there he stood!"

"It would not be a bad idea for him to conceal his pedestal about him and mount it when it became necessary for him to remain stationary," said Arbuthnot flippantly, and yet with a momentary gravity in his eyes somewhat at variance with his speech.

She went on as if he had not spoken.

"It was certainly a curious feeling," she said. "Everything came to me in a flash. I suppose I am rather a light and frivolous person, not sufficiently given to reflecting on the passage of time, and suddenly there he stood, and I remembered that eight years had gone by, and that everything was changed."

"A great many things can happen in eight years," commented Arbuthnot.

"A great many things have happened to *me*," she said. "*Everything* has happened to me!"

"No," said Arbuthnot, in a low, rather reflective tone, and looking as he spoke not at her, but at the girl whose white dress did not fit and who at that moment whirled rather breathlessly by the door. "No—not everything."

"I have grown from a child to a woman," she said. "I have married, I have arrived at maternal dignity. I don't see that there is anything else that could happen—at least, anything comfortable."

"No," he admitted. "I don't think there is anything comfortable."

"Well, it is very certain I don't want to try anything uncomfortable," she said. "'Happy the people whose annals are tiresome.' Montesquieu says that, and it always struck me as meaning something."

"I hope it does not mean that you consider your annals tiresome," said Arbuthnot. "How that girl does dance! This is the fifth time she has passed the door."

"I hope her partner likes it as much as she does," remarked Bertha. "And as to the annals, I have not found them tiresome at all, thank you. As we happen to have come to retrospect, I think I may say that I have

rather enjoyed myself, on the whole. I have had no tremendous emotions."

"On which you may congratulate yourself," Arbuthnot put in.

"I do," she responded. "I know I should not have liked them. I have left such things to—you, for instance."

She said this with a little air of civil mocking which was by no means unbecoming, and to which her companion was well used.

"Thank you," he replied, amiably. "You showed consideration, of course—but that's your way."

"I may not have lived exactly the kind of life I used to think I should live—when I was a school-girl," she went on, smiling, "but who does?—and who would want to when she attained years of discretion? And I may not be exactly the kind of person I—meant to be, but I think I may congratulate you on that—and Richard. You would never have been the radiant creatures you are if I had ripened to that state of perfection. You could not have borne up under it."

She rose from her seat and took his arm.

"No," she said, "I am not the kind of person I meant to be, and Colonel Tredennis

has reminded me of the fact and elevated my spirits. Let us go and find him, and invite him to dinner to-morrow. He deserves it."

As they passed the door of the dancing-room she paused a moment to look in, and as she did so caught sight of the girl in the white dress once more.

"She is not tired yet," she said, "but her partner is—and so am I. If Richard has come, I think I shall go home."

CHAPTER V.

THE AMORYS.

TREDENNIS dined with them the next day, and many days afterwards. On meeting him, Richard Amory had taken one of his rather numerous enthusiastic fancies to him, and in pursuit and indulgence of this fancy could not see enough of him. These fanciful friendships were the delights of his life, and he never denied himself one, though occasionally they wore themselves out in time to give place to others.

Tredennis found him as the professor had described him, "a bright fellow, and a handsome fellow." He had thought that when he came forward to introduce himself, as he had done at the Gardners' reception, he had never seen a brighter or more attractive human being. He had a dark, delicate, eager face, soft,

waving hair, tossed lightly back from a forehead whose beauty was almost feminine; a slight, lithe figure, and an air of youth and alertness which would have been attraction enough in itself. He was interested in everything—each subject touched upon seeming to awaken him to enthusiasm—the Indians, the settlers, the agencies, the fort life—equally interested in each, and equally ready to confront, in the most delightfully sanguine mood, the problems each suggested.

"It is worth a great deal to have an opportunity to judge of these things from the inside," he said. "There are a thousand questions I want to ask, but we shall see you often, of course. We must see you often. It will be the greatest pleasure to us."

His first entrance into their house, the following evening, was something which always set itself apart in Tredennis's memory.

A gay burst of laughter greeted him as the parlour door was thrown open,—laughter so gay that the first announcement of his name was drowned by it, and, as he paused for a moment, he had the opportunity to take in fully the picture before him. The room was a pretty and luxurious one, its prettiness and

luxury wearing the air of being the result of natural growth, and suggesting no oppressiveness of upholstery. Its comforts were evidently the outcome of the fancies and desires of those who lounged, or read, or talked in it, and its knick-knacks and follies were all indicative of some charming whim carried out with a delightful freedom from reason which was their own excuse.

In the open fire-place a bright wood fire burned, and upon the white wolf skin before it Richard Amory lay at unconventional full length, with his hands clasped lightly under his head, evidently enjoying to the utmost the ease of his position, the glow of the fire, and the jest of the moment, while near him, in an easy-chair, sat Arbuthnot. Both of them looked at Bertha, who stood with one hand resting on the low mantel.

"I have been waiting for a long time," Tredennis heard her say, and then as the servant announced his name again she stopped speaking, and came forward to meet him, while Richard sprang lightly to his feet.

"I will tell you at the outset," she said, "that it is not one of the time-honoured customs of Washington for people to receive their

guests with this ingenuous and untrammelled freedom, but——"

"But she has been telling us a story," put in Richard, shaking hands with him; "and she told it so well that we forgot the time. And she must tell it again."

"It is not worth telling again," she said, as they returned to the fire; "and, besides, I told it to you in the strictest confidence. And if that is not reason enough, I don't mind confessing that it is a story which doesn't exhibit me in an amiable light. It shows a temper and viciousness that you count among your home comforts, and don't feel it decent to display for the benefit of any one but your immediate relatives."

Tredennis looked down at her curiously. His first glance at her had shown him that to-night she was even farther removed from his past than she had seemed before. Her rich dress showed flashes of bright colour, her eyes were alight with some touch of excitement, and her little wrists were covered with pretty barbarities of bangles and charms which jingled as she moved.

"I should like to hear the story," he said.

"It is a very good story," commented

Arbuthnot, laughing; "I think I would tell it over again."

"Oh, yes," said Richard; "Colonel Tredennis must hear it."

Bertha looked across at Tredennis, and as she did so he saw in her eyes what he had seen the night before and had not understood, but which dawned upon him now—a slight smiling defiance of his thoughts, whatsoever they might be.

"You won't like it," she said; "but you shall hear it, if you wish. It is about a great lady——"

"That will add to the interest," said Tredennis. "You have great ladies in Washington?"

"It is infinitely to our credit that they are only occasional incidents," she answered, "and that they don't often last long. When one considers the number of quiet, domesticated women who find themselves launched suddenly, by some wave of chance, into the whirl of public life, one naturally wonders that we are not afflicted with some very great ladies indeed, but it must be confessed we have far less to complain of in that respect than might be expected."

"But this particular great lady?" said Tredennis.

"Is one of the occasional incidents. Some one said that our society was led by bewildered Europeans and astonished Americans—Americans astonished to find themselves suddenly bearing the responsibility of the highest positions, and Europeans bewildered by being called upon to adjust themselves to startling novelties in manners and customs. This great lady is one of the astonished Americans, and, privately, she is very much astonished, indeed."

Arbuthnot laughed.

"You will observe," he commented, "that Mrs. Amory's remarks are entirely unbiased by any feminine prejudices."

"You will observe," said Bertha, "that Mr. Arbuthnot's remarks are entirely unbiased by any prejudice in favour of my reliability of statement. But," she added, with a delusive air of amiable candour, "I am sure you cannot deny that I was very civil to her."

"I have not a doubt of it," responded Arbuthnot. "And I don't mind adding that I should like to have been there to see."

"Colonel Tredennis shall judge," she said,

"whether it would have been really worth while. I will make the story brief. Last season the great lady gave me cause to remember her. We had not met, and to please a friend, I called upon her. We found her in her drawing-room, engaged in entertaining two newly arrived *attachés*. They seemed to interest her. I regret to say that we did not. She did not hear our names when the servant announced them, and the insignificance of our general bearing was against us. I think it must have been that, for we were comparatively well dressed—at least, Miss Jessup's description of our costumes in the *Wabash Times* gave that impression the following week. Perhaps we looked timid and unaccustomed to 'the luxurious trophies from many climes' (Miss Jessup again) surrounding us. The ingenuous modesty of extreme youth which you may have observed——"

"Repeatedly," replied Arbuthnot.

"Thank you. But I suppose it told against me on this occasion. Our respectable attire and air of general worthiness availed nothing. The great lady rose, stared at us, gave us her finger-ends, called us by names which did not belong to us, and sat down again, turning

her back upon us with much frankness, and resuming her conversation with the *attachés*, not interrupting it to address six words to us during the three minutes we remained. That is the first half of the story."

"It promises well for the second half," said Tredennis.

"The second is *my* half," said Bertha. "Later, she discovered our real names and the fact that—shall I say that Miss Jessup knew them, and thought them worthy of mention in the *Wabash Times?* That would perhaps be a good way of putting it. Then she called, but did not see me, as I was out. We did not meet again until this afternoon. I was making the Cabinet calls, and had the pleasure of encountering her at the house of the Secretary of War. Perhaps Miss Jessup had sent her a copy of the *Wabash Times* yesterday, with the society column marked—I don't know. But she was pleased to approach me. I received her advances with the mild consideration of one who sees a mistake made, but is prevented by an amiable delicacy from correcting it, and observing this, she was led into the indiscretion of saying, with graceful leniency, that she feared I did not know her.

I think it is really there that my half begins. I smiled with flattering incredulity, and said: 'That would be very strange in a Washingtonian.'

"'When you called——' she began.

"I looked at her with a blush, as of slight embarrassment, which seemed to disturb her.

"'You have not forgotten that you called?' she remarked chillingly.

"'It would have been impossible for me to forget anything so agreeable,' I said, as though in delicately eager apology. 'I am most unlucky. It was some more fortunate person.'

"'But,' she said, 'I returned the visit.'

"'I received your card,' I replied, smiling ingenuously into her eyes, 'and it reminded me of my delinquency. Of course I knew it was a mistake.'

"And after I had smiled into her eyes for a second or so longer, she began to understand, and I think by this time it is quite clear to her."

"There must be a moral to that," commented Tredennis.

"There is," she responded, with serene readiness. "A useful one. It is this: It is always safe—in Washington—to be civil to

the respectably clad. If the exigencies of public position demand that you receive, not the people you wish to see, or the people who wish to see you, but the respectably clad, it is well to deal in glittering generalities of good manners, and even—if you choose to go so far—good feeling. There are numbers of socially besieged women in Washington who actually put the good feeling first, but the Government cannot insist on that, you know, so it remains a matter of taste."

"If you could draw the line ——" began Richard.

"There is no line," said Bertha, "so you can't draw it. And it was not myself I avenged this afternoon, but—the respectably clad."

"And before she became an astonished American," put in Arbuthnot, "this mistaken person was possibly ——"

Bertha interposed, with a pretty gesture which set all the bangles jingling.

"Ah," she said, "but we have so little to do with that, that I have not even the pleasure of using it in my arguments against her. The only thing to be reasonably required of her now is that she should be sufficiently well-

mannered during her career. She might assume her deportment with her position, and dispose of it at a sacrifice afterwards. Imagine what a field in the way of advertisement, for instance: 'For sale. A neatly fitting suit of good manners. Used through one administration. Somewhat worn through active service, but still equal to much wear and tear.'"

That which struck Tredennis more forcibly than all else was her habit of treating everything lightly, and he observed that it was a habit Arbuthnot shared with her. The intimacy existing between the two seemed an unusual one, and appeared to have established itself through slow and gradual growth. It had no ephemeral air, and bore somehow the impress of their having shared their experiences in common for some time. Beneath the very derision which marked their treatment of each other was a suggestion of unmistakable good fellowship and quick appreciation of each other's moods. When Bertha made a fanciful speech, Arbuthnot's laugh rang out even before Richard's, which certainly was ready enough in response; and when Arbuthnot vouchsafed a semi-serious remark, Bertha

gave him an undivided attention which expressed her belief that what he said would be worth listening to. Amory's province it seemed to be to delight in both of them—to admire their readiness, to applaud their jests, and to encourage them to display their powers. That he admired Arbuthnot immensely was no less evident than that no gift or grace of Bertha's was lost upon him.

His light-hearted, inconsequent enjoyment of the pleasure of the moment impressed Tredennis singularly. He was so ready to be moved by any passing zephyr of sentiment or emotion, and so entirely and sweet-temperedly free from any fatiguing effect when the breeze had once swept over him.

"All that I have to complain of in you two people," he said gaily, in the course of the evening, "is that you have no sentiment—none whatever."

"We are full of it," said Arbuthnot, "both of us—but we conceal it, and we feel that it makes us interesting. Nothing is more interesting than repressed emotion. The appearance of sardonic coldness and stoicism which has deceived you is but a hollow mockery; beneath it I secrete a maëlstrom of impas-

sioned feeling and a mausoleum of blighted hopes."

"There is a fashion in emotions as in everything else," said Bertha. "And sentiment is 'out.' So is stateliness. Who would submit to stateliness in these days? It was the highest aim of our great-grandmothers to be stately, but stateliness went out with ruffles and the minuet, and a certain kind of Roman nose you find in all portraits taken in the reigns of the Georges. Now we are sprightly. It is imperative that we should be sprightly. I hope you are prepared to be sprightly Colonel Tredennis."

He was very conscious of not looking so. In fact, the idea was growing upon him that upon the whole his grave face and large figure were rather out of place among all this airy *badinage.* His predominant feeling was that his unfortunate tendency to seriousness and silence was not a Washingtonian quality, and augured poorly for his future. Here were people who could treat lightly, not only their subjects, but themselves and each other. The fire-lit room, with its trifles and knick-knacks and oddities; the graceful, easy figure of Richard Amory lounging idly in his chair,

Bertha with her bright dress and fantastic little ornaments flashing and jingling, Arbuthnot smiling faintly, and touching his moustache with a long fair hand—each and all suggested to him in some whimsical, vague fashion that he was too large and not pliable enough for his surroundings, and that if he moved he might upset something, or tread upon some sparkling, not too substantial theory.

"I am afraid I am not as well prepared as I might be," he answered. "Do you always find it easy?"

"I!" she returned. "Oh, perfectly! it is only Mr. Arbuthnot who finds it difficult—being a prey to his feelings. In his moments of deep mental anguish, the sprightliness which society demands of him is a thing from which his soul recoils."

Shortly after dinner, Arbuthnot went away. He had a final call to make upon some friends who were going away, after having taken an active part in the inaugural ceremonies and ball. It appeared that they had come from the West, with the laudable intention of making the most of these festivities, and that he had felt it his duty to do his utmost for their entertainment.

"I hope they enjoyed themselves," said Bertha, as he stood making his adieux.

"Well," was his reply, "it strikes me they did. I took them to the Treasury, and the Patent Office, and the Army and Navy Department, and up into the dome of the Capitol, and into the Senate and the House, and they heard the inaugural address, and danced at the ball, and saw the ex-President, and bought photographs of the new one, and tired themselves out, and are going home a party of total wrecks, but without a thing on their consciences, so I think they must have enjoyed themselves. I hope so. I didn't. I don't grudge them anything, but it is the ninetieth time I have been through the Treasury, and the twentieth time I have climbed to the dome—and the exercise has lost its freshness."

After he had left the room, he returned, drawing from the pocket of his rather dandyish light overcoat three small packages, which he laid on a side table.

"This is for Janey, and this for Jack, and this for Marjorie," he said. "I told them they would find them there in the morning."

"Thank you," answered Bertha, as if the

proceeding was one to which she was well accustomed.

When he was fairly gone, Richard Amory broke into a half-laugh.

"What a queer fellow he is!" he said.

Bertha returned to her place by the fire, taking from the mantel a little screen of peacock feathers and shading her face with it.

"Do you know," she said, "that he rarely leaves the house without one of us making that remark, and yet it always has an illusive air of being entirely new."

"Well," remarked Richard, "he is a queer fellow, and there's no denying it. Imagine a fellow like that coolly rambling about with neat packages of bonbons in his fastidious overcoat pocket, to be bestowed on children without any particular claim on him. Why does he do it?"

"It doesn't exactly arise from enthusiasm awakened by their infant charms," said Bertha, "and he never professed that it did."

"But he must care for them a little," returned Richard.

"The fact is that you don't know what he cares for," said Bertha, "and it is rather one of his fascinations. I suppose that is really

what we mean by saying he is a queer fellow."

"At all events," said Richard, amiably, "he is a nice fellow, and one can manage to subsist on that. All I complain of is that he hasn't any object. A man ought to have an object—two or three, if he likes."

"He doesn't like," said Bertha, "for he certainly hasn't an object—though, after all that belongs to his mode of life."

"I should like," said Tredennis, "to know something of the mode of life of a man who hasn't an object."

"You will gain a good deal of information on the subject if you remain long in Washington," answered Bertha. "We generally have either too many objects or none at all. If it is not your object to get into the White House, or the Cabinet, or somewhere else, it is probably your fate to be installed in a 'department,' and, as you cannot hope to retain your position through any particular circumspectness or fitness for it, you have not any object left you."

"The fact is," said Richard, "it would have been a great deal better for Larry if he had stayed where he was and fought it out."

"The fact is," said Bertha, "it would be a great deal better for nine out of ten of the rest if they stayed where they were. And when Larry came, he did not come under specially exhilarating circumstances, and just then I suppose it seemed to him that the rest of his life was not worth much to him."

"It has struck me," said Richard, reflectively, "that he had a blow of some sort about that time—something apart from the loss of his fortune. I am not sure but that I once heard some wandering rumour of there being a young woman somewhere —— "

"Oh!" said Bertha, in a low, rather hurried voice, "he had a blow. There is no mistake about that—he had a blow, and there was a good deal in him that did not survive it."

"And yet he doesn't strike you as being that sort of fellow," said Richard, still in reflection. "You wouldn't think of him as being a fellow with a grief."

Bertha broke into delighted laughter.

"A grief!" she exclaimed. "That is very good. I wish he had heard it. A grief! I wonder what he would do with it in his moments of recreation—at receptions, for

instance, and *musicales*, and germans. He might conceal it in his opera hat, but I am afraid it would be in the way. Poor Larry! Griefs are as much out of fashion as stateliness, and he not only couldn't indulge in one if he would, but he wouldn't if he could."

"Well, how would you put it," said Richard, "if you did not call it a grief?"

Bertha laughed again.

"If I put it at all," she answered, "I would say that he had once been very uncomfortable, but had discreetly devoted himself to getting over it, and had succeeded decently well—and last, but not least, I would add that it would be decidedly difficult to make him uncomfortable again."

Tredennis found it impossible to avoid watching her with grave interest each time she spoke or moved. He was watching her now with a sort of aside sensibility to her bright drapery, her flashing, tinkling wrists, and her screen of peacock feathers.

"She is very light," he was saying inwardly.

She turned to him with a smile.

"Would he strike *you* as 'a fellow with a grief'?" she inquired.

"No," he answered; "I cannot say he would."

"No," she said, "that is certain enough. If you went away and never saw him again, you would remember just this of him—if you remembered him at all: that his clothes fitted him well, that he had an agreeable laugh, that he had a civil air of giving you his attention when you spoke, and—nothing else."

"And that is not all there is of him?" Tredennis asked.

She looked down at her feather screen, still smiling slightly.

"No," she answered, rather slowly, "not quite all, but even I don't quite know how much more there is, and Richard, who has known him at intervals all his life, lapses into speaking of him as 'a fellow with a grief.'"

Richard rose from his chair.

"Oh," he said, with much cheerfulness, "there is no denying that you two are the outgrowth of an effete civilisation. You are always arriving at logical deductions concerning each other, and you have a tendency to the derision of all the softer emotions.

You are a couple of world-worn creatures, and it is left to me to represent the youth and ardour of the family."

"That is true," said Bertha, in her soft mocking voice. "We are battered and worldly wise—and we have no object."

"But I have," said Richard, "and if Colonel Tredennis will come up stairs with me, I will show him what a few of them are, if he takes an interest in such things."

"What," said Bertha, "the laboratory, or the library, or —— "

"All of them," he answered, "including the new collection." And he turned upon Tredennis the brightest imaginable smile.

Tredennis left his chair in response to it.

"I am interested in all collections, more or less," he said.

"So am I," said Bertha—"more or less." And they went out of the room with this little gibe in their ears.

Before the conclusion of his visit to the domains up stairs, Tredennis had learned a great deal of Richard Amory. He had found that he had a taste for mechanics, a taste for science, a taste for literature. He had a geological cabinet, an entomological collection, a

collection of coins, of old books, of old engravings, all in different stages of incompleteness. He had, even, in his small workroom, the unfinished models of an invention or two, each of which he was ready to explain with an enthusiasm which flamed up as the demands of the moment required, in the most delightful and inspiring manner.

"I shall finish them all, one of these days," he said, blithely. "I am always interested in one or the other, and they give me an object. And, as I said down stairs, what a man wants is an object. That is what Larry stands in need of. Give him an object, and he would not indulge in that cold-blooded introspection and retrospection. Bertha has told him so herself."

"They are very good friends," said Tredennis.

"Oh, yes! They are fond of each other, in their way. It is their way to jeer a good deal, but they would stand by each other, I fancy, if the time came when it was needful."

He referred, in the course of the conversation, to his profession, and his reference to it caused Tredennis to class it in his mind, in

some way or other, with the unfinished models and incomplete collections.

"I can't say I like the law," he said, "but it was a sort of final resource. I tried medicine for a while,—took a course of lectures,—but it didn't suit me. And then two or three other things turned up, but I didn't seem to suit them. And so it ended in my choosing law, or letting it choose me. I don't know that I am exactly a success at it. It's well we don't depend on it. Bertha ——" He broke off rather suddenly, and began again at once. "I have plans which, if they are as successful as they promise to be, will change the aspect of affairs." And he laughed exultantly.

On their way down stairs, they came upon an open door, which had been closed as they went up. It opened into a large, cheerful room, with gay pictures on the walls, and a high brass fender guarding the glowing fire, before which a figure sat in a low rocking-chair, holding a child in its arms.

"That is the nursery," said Richard. "Bertha, what is the matter with Janey?"

It was Bertha who sat in the rocking-chair, and as she turned her face quietly towards

them, Tredennis felt himself betrayed into a slight start. Neither her eyes nor her colour were as bright as they had been down stairs. She had taken off her ornaments, and they lay in a small glittering heap upon the stand at her side. The child's head rested upon her breast, and her bare arm and hand held its body in an easy position with a light, close, accustomed touch. She spoke in a soft, lowered voice.

"Janey is nervous to-night," she answered. "She cannot go to sleep, and I am trying to quiet her. Will you excuse me if I do not come down? She really needs me."

CHAPTER VI.

MR. ARBUTHNOT.

WHEN Tredennis found himself standing out in the street, half an hour later, it was this picture which remained in his mind, and no other. If an effort had been required to retain the impression upon his mental retina, he would have made the effort with the deliberate intention of excluding all else, but no effort was needed.

"I suppose it is sentiment," he said, taking his cigar out of his mouth, and looking up at the starlit sky. "I have no doubt it is sentiment. A man who has lived mooning alone as long as I have, drifts in that direction naturally, I suppose. And I am a rigid, old-fashioned fellow. I don't fit in with the rest of it. But, with her child in her arms and her gewgaws laid on the table, I seemed to

see something I knew. I'll think of that, and not of the other."

It was just at this moment that he caught sight of a figure approaching him from a distance of a few yards. It was the figure of a man, wrapped in a cloak and walking with bent head at a leisurely pace, which argued that he was deep in meditation. As it drew nearer, Tredennis recognised something familiar in its outlines, and before it had taken half a dozen steps forward, the head was raised suddenly, almost as if attracted by something in his gaze, and he recognised the professor, who, seeing him, came towards him at once, and laid a friendly hand on his shoulder.

"You are coming away from the house, are you?" he said. "I might have known I should have the chance of meeting you when I came out to take my ramble before going to bed. I do it every night. I find I sleep better for it. Perhaps Bertha told you."

"No," answered Tredennis; "I had not been told of it."

The professor gave him a little impetus forward with the hand he still kept on his shoulder.

"Walk on with me," he said. "What I like is the deserted look of things, and the silence. There is nothing more silent and deserted than such a street as this at night. There is a quiet and emptiness about it which impress themselves on you more than the stillness of a desert. Perhaps it is the sleep around you in the houses,—the people who have lost their hold on the world and life for the time being. They are far enough away by this time, most of them, and we are no more certain where they are than we shall be after they have lain down for the last time. How did you find Bertha?"

His voice changed as he asked the question, dropping its key somewhat; and, quiet though its tone was, Tredennis thought he recognised a faint suggestion of consciousness in it.

"She looked very well," he answered. "And was very bright."

"She is generally that," said the professor. "Who was there?"

"A Mr. Arbuthnot."

"Arbuthnot! Yes; to be sure. He generally is there. He is a relative of Richard's. They are fond of him. I was to have been there myself, but I had a previous engage-

ment. And I suppose they made light of each other, as usual?"

"You mean——" began Tredennis.

"Arbuthnot and Bertha. They always do it, and Richard looks on and enjoys it. He is a queer fellow."

"Mr. Amory?" Tredennis questioned, uncertainly.

"No, no; Arbuthnot. He is a queer fellow, Arbuthnot."

Tredennis laughed.

"That is what they said in the house," he responded.

"Well, it's true," said the professor, reflectively, "and there is no denying it."

"They said that, too," said Tredennis. "And Mrs. Amory added that it was a habit they had."

"I don't know," said the professor, still keeping his hand on Tredennis's shoulder, and seeming to study the pavement as he walked. "I don't know what the man has done with his past, and I don't know what he is going to do with his future. I don't think he knows about the future himself."

"It struck me," said Tredennis,—"I don't know why,—that he did not care."

"That's it," said the professor. "He doesn't care."

They walked a few steps in silence, and then he went on:

"He never will care," he said, "unless something happens to rouse him."

"I am obliged to confess," said Tredennis, "that I am afraid I am prepared to underrate him. And it seemed to me that there wasn't much in him to rouse."

"Oh, you'll underrate him," returned the professor, "at first. And you may never get over it; but there are also ten chances to one that you do. I did."

"You began by underrating him?"

"I don't overrate him now," said the professor. "I don't know that I am particularly fond of him, though there have been moments —just moments—when I have been threatened with it. But I have come to the conclusion that there is something in him to rouse, and that it wouldn't be the wisest thing in the world to rouse it."

"Do you mean," said Tredennis, slowly, "that it would take a woman to rouse it?"

"Yes," answered the professor, just as slowly, "it would take a woman. And there

are circumstances under which it would be better for the woman if she let what she might rouse lie and sleep."

"For instance?" said Tredennis, with a fierce leap of every pulse in his body.

"If," said the professor, deliberately, "if she were not free to give what his feeling for her demanded."

He paused to turn Tredennis round.

"Confound him," he said, with a curiously irritable seriousness. "If he once reached a white heat,—that fellow with his objectless follies, and his dress-coat, and his white necktie, and his opera hat under his arm,—if he once forgot them and himself, it would be her fate to remember him as long as her life should last."

"*Her* fate?" said Tredennis.

"I said it would have to be a woman," said the professor. "I should not like it to be a woman I felt an interest in. We have reached the end of the block. Let us walk back again."

When he spoke again, it was of Richard Amory, not of Arbuthnot.

"You went up stairs into the Museum, as Bertha calls it?" he said.

"Yes," answered Tredennis; "and into the work-room."

"And saw the models, and the collections, and the books?"

"Yes."

"He has a good many enthusiasms, Richard," said the professor. "They might form a collection of themselves. He won't tire of life easily. He is a fine contrast to—the other."

They were nearing the house again by this time, and he glanced up at its front.

"There is a light in the nursery window," he said. "It must be one of Janey's restless nights."

"Yes," said Tredennis. "Mrs. Amory was with her when we came down stairs, and she told us that the child was nervous and needed her."

"She has wonderful patience with them," said the professor, "and a sort of genius for understanding their vague young needs and desires. She never does them an injustice for want of thought, and never fails them. I have seen her spend half an hour half-kneeling, half-sitting on the nursery floor, by one of them, with her arm round it, questioning

it, and helping it to tell its own story, in a way that was very motherly. There is a great deal of the maternal instinct in her."

Tredennis made no reply, but there rose before his mental vision the picture before the nursery fire, and he saw again the soft close clasp of the fair hand and arm.

"It's curious how seldom we speak of paternal instinct," the professor went on. "It is always maternal instinct. Well, it is a great thing. And it is a great safeguard where—where life is not satisfactory. And as one grows older, one sees a good deal of that. It is pitiful sometimes, when one finds it, as one so often does, in young things who haven't got over their desperate mental insistence on their right to be happy."

He checked himself, with a faint laugh.

"I'm prosing, my boy," he said. "I always do it when I take my saunter at night. It is a sort of safeguard against doing it in the day. And I find I am specially given to it when I talk of Bertha. It is the paternal instinct, if there is such a thing. You remember how we talked of her when she came home from school. Do you find her much changed?"

"She has changed from a girl—a child, almost—to a woman," said Tredennis.

"Yes," said the professor, "from a child to a woman. And yet, when you look back upon it, eight years is a very short time. Sometimes it seems only yesterday that she startled me at the dinner-table by saying that she expected me to classify and label her."

"There have been times," said Tredennis, "when it seemed only yesterday to me; but to-night it is something far away."

The professor looked up at him quickly.

"Is it?" he said. "Well, well," rather vaguely, "it is a habit they have fallen into—that of making light of things. It is a kind of fashion nowadays. She did not treat things lightly then, did she? How she believed all that she believed—how frankly she impugned your veracity in argument, without being at all conscious of the incivility. How bright her eyes and lips were when she asked me if she could not have the label without the pin. I wish——"

He stopped suddenly once more.

"We have reached the end of the block again, my boy," he said, "and I have walked

long enough, and talked long enough. We must say good-night to each other."

They were standing beneath a street-lamp, and having looked up at Tredennis to say this, he drew back a pace to look again, in whimsically gentle admiration of his stalwart proportions.

"What a soldierly fellow you are," he said; "and how you stand out among the rest of us." And then, with an odd change of manner, he drew nearer, and laid his hand on his shoulder once more. "I'll say again," he said, "what I have said before. I wish you had been a son of mine, my boy."

And, as he said it, there fell upon the quiet of the street the sound of approaching footsteps ringing on the pavement, and, turning instinctively towards them, each saw an easily recognised masculine figure, which, reaching the house in which the Amorys lived, paused for a moment beneath the lighted window, and flung forth to the night, airily and by no means unmusically, a few bars of one of the popular airs from a gay French opera, and then crossing the street, applied a latch-key to the door of the opposite house, and entering, closed it.

"The fellow has a pleasant voice," said the professor. "It is a voice you like to hear. And that is one of his whims."

"I thought I recognised the figure," said Tredennis. "It is —— "

"Arbuthnot," said the professor. "Arbuthnot."

And then they parted.

CHAPTER VII.

BERTHA'S HOME.

To Tredennis the next three months were full of event. It was mostly quiet event, and yet, as day followed day, he was conscious that, in each twenty-four hours, he lived through some new mental experience which left its mark upon him. The first two weeks seemed to make his old, regular, routine-governed life a thing of the far past, from which he was entirely separated by a gulf which it would be impossible to recross. He awakened to a recognition of this at the end of the second week, and told himself that the feeling was due to the complete novelty of his surroundings and their natural influences upon him. He found himself placed among people whose lives, ambitions, and interests were all new to him, and of a kind with which he had

never before been thrown into close contact for a length of time sufficient to allow of analysis. In his first visit to Washington he had regarded its peculiarities merely as an amateur and a visitor; now he saw and studied them from a different stand-point. The public buildings were no longer mere edifices in his eyes, but developed into tremendous communities, regulated by a tremendous system for which there could be no medium or indefinite standing, but which must either be a tremendous credit or a tremendous discredit to itself and the power it represented. The human side of the place grew and impressed itself upon him. He began to feel the full significance of the stream of humanity which ebbed and flowed to and from these buildings at stated hours in the day. After a few afternoon walks on the Avenue, he could recognise many a face that passed him, and comprehend something of what it typified. He could single out the young woman who supported her family upon her salary, and the young woman who bought her ribbons with it; the widow whose pay fed half a dozen children, and the husband whose earnings were appropriated by a wife of fashionable aspirations;

the man of broken career, whose wasted ambitions and frustrated purposes were buried in the monotonous routine of a Government clerkship, and who asked and hoped for no greater boon than to be permitted to hold his place through as much of the future as remained to him. It was an orderly and respectably dressed crowd, as a rule, but there was many a sad face to be seen in it, and many an anxious and disappointed one. It never failed to interest Tredennis, and he took his afternoon walk so often at the same hour that the passers-by began to know his tall, soldierly figure and sunbrowned face, and rather expected to encounter them; and when the newspapers had referred to him on a dozen occasions or so, there were not a few who recognised him, and pointed him out to each other as something of a celebrity and a hero, and so worth seeing.

This general knowledge which people seemed to have of one another was one thing which struck him as peculiarly local. It was the rule, and not the exception, that in walking out he met persons he knew or knew of, and he found it at no time difficult to discover the names and positions of those who attracted

his attention. Almost all noticeable and numerous unnoticeable persons were to be distinguished in some way from their fellows. The dark, sinewy man he observed standing on the steps of a certain family hotel, was a noted New England senator; his companion was the head of an important department; the man who stood near was the private secretary of the President, or the editor of one of the dailies, or a man with a much-discussed claim against the Government; the handsome woman whose carriage drew up before a fashionable millinery establishment was the wife of a foreign diplomate, or of a well-known politician, or of a member of the Cabinet; the woman who crossed her path as she got out was a celebrated female-suffragist, or female physician or lawyer, or perhaps that much talked of will-o'-the-wisp, a female lobbyist; and eight persons out of every ten passing them knew their names and not a little of their private history. So much was crowded within a comparatively limited radius that it was not easy for any person or thing worthy of note to be lost or hidden from the public eye.

By the most natural gradations, Tredennis

found the whole tenor of his existence changed in this atmosphere. His fixed habits of life gave way before the influences surrounding him.

One of the most subtle of these influences was that of his intimacy with the members of the Amory household, which grew as he had not at all anticipated that it would. He had thought of the acquaintance in the first place as one not likely to ripen into anything beyond its rather conventional significance. Perhaps, on the whole, he had been content to let it rest as it was, feeling only half-consciously that he should be in a quieter frame of mind and less liable to vague pangs and disappointments.

"It is all different," he had said to himself. "And it is all over. It is better that it should remain as it is."

But after his first visit, Richard did not choose to lose sight of him. It was his fancy to seek him out and make much of and take possession of him, with an amiability and frank persistence in the chase which were at once complimentary and engaging.

"Look here!" he would say, having followed him up to reproach him. "You don't

suppose we intend to be treated in this manner? We won't hear of it. We want you. Your stalwart solidity is what we have been needing to give us weight and balance. Only yesterday Bertha was holding you up to Arbuthnot as a model of steadfastness of purpose. We thought we were going to see you every other day, at least, and you have not been near us for a week. Bertha wonders what we have been guilty of."

And then he would be carried up to lunch or dinner, or to spend the evening; and each visit resulted in another and another, until it gradually became the most natural thing in the world that he should drop in at odd hours, because it seemed that he was always expected, and he appeared to have a place among them.

"Do you know what we shall do with you if you remain here a year?" Bertha had said to him at the outset. "We shall domesticate you. We not only domesticated Mr. Arbuthnot, but we appropriated him. We feel that we have invested largely in him, and that he ought to respect our rights and pay interest. Sometimes I wonder how he likes it, and just now it occurs to me to wonder how you would like it."

"The question is," Tredennis answered, "how *you* would like it."

He was always conscious of a silent distaste for being compared to Mr. Arbuthnot, and he was also always conscious of the youthful weakness of the feeling.

"It is the kind of thing which belongs to a younger man," he used to say to himself. "It is arrant folly, and yet I am not fond of the fellow."

But, as Bertha had predicted, he became in a manner domesticated in the household. Perhaps the truth was that his natural tendency was towards the comfort and easy communion of home life. He was a little surprised to find himself develop a strong fancy for children. He had never been averse to them, but he had known nothing of them, and had never suspected himself of any definite disposition to fondness for them. After he had watched Bertha's during a few visits, he began to like them, and to be oddly interested in their sayings and doings. He discovered Jack to be a decidedly sturdy and masculine little fellow, with rather more than his share of physical strength and beauty; and, making amicable advances towards him, was met half-

way with a fearless readiness which was very attractive. Then he made friends with Janey, and found himself still more interested. Her childish femininity was even better worth studying than Jack's miniature manhood. She was a small, gentle creature, with clinging hands and much faith, but also with a delightful sense of infantile dignity, and the friendship which established itself between them was a very absorbing sentiment. It was not long before it became an understood thing among the juvenile portion of the establishment that Tredennis was to be counted among the spoils. His incoming was greeted with rapture, his outgoing was regarded as a species of calamity only to be borne because it was unavoidable. He could tell stories of Indians and bears, and on more than one occasion was decoyed into the nursery, and found to be not entirely without resources in the matter of building forts with blocks, and defending them against aboriginal warriors with tin soldiers. His own sense of enjoyment of the discovery of these accomplishments in himself filled him with a whimsical pleasure. He began to carry toys in his pockets, and became a connoisseur of such dainties as were considered harmless

to the juvenile constitution; and after having been reproved by Janey, on two or three occasions, for the severity of his air, he began also to have a care that the expression of his countenance should be less serious and more likely to win the approval of innocent small creatures, who considered gravity uncalled-for and mysterious. At first he had seemed to learn but little of Bertha herself, notwithstanding that a day seldom passed without their meeting, and there were times when he fancied he had determined that there was but little to learn. The gaieties of the season over, she announced her intention of resting; and her manner of accomplishing this end was to inaugurate a series of small festivities, with a result of occupying each day until midnight. She gave small, informal dinners, suppers, and teas to the favoured few who would be most likely to enjoy and find them exhilarating, and when she did not give a dinner or tea, her evenings were bestowed upon Arbuthnot and half a dozen of the inner circle, whose habit it was to drop in and talk politics, literature, or entertaining nonsense.

At such times it was not at all unusual for the professor to ramble in at about nine

o'clock, and profess to partake of the cup of tea Bertha offered him, and which he invariably left more than half-full upon the small table by his chair. His old tender interest in her had not lessened in degree, Tredennis noticed, after seeing them together on two or three occasions, but it had altered in kind. Sometimes the look of curious speculation returned to his eyes, but oftener they expressed a patient, kindly watchfulness. It was not long before Tredennis began to observe that this quietly watchful look generally showed itself when Arbuthnot was present. The first time that he felt the full force of the truth of this was one evening when there had been only two or three callers, who had remained but a short time, going away early, and leaving no one in the parlours but himself, the professor, and Arbuthnot.

Arbuthnot had come in later than usual, and had appeared to be in an unusual mood. He was pale when he entered, and had no jesting speech to make. He took his seat by Bertha, and replied to her remarks with but little of his customary animation, now and then lapsing into silence as if he had forgotten his surroundings. Bertha seemed inclined to

let his humour pass without notice, as if it was not exactly a new experience, but Richard commented upon it.

"Something has gone wrong," he said. "What is it, Larry?"

"Nothing has gone wrong," Arbuthnot answered, with a short, cheerless laugh. "I have seen a ghost, that is all."

"A ghost!" said Bertha, in a low voice, and then sat silent, guarding her face from the fire with her favourite peacock-feather screen.

The professor began to stir his tea round and round, which exercise was his customary assistance to reflection or debate. He glanced at the peacock-feather screen, and then at Arbuthnot.

"A ghost is always an interesting scientific conundrum," he observed. "What form did it take?"

Arbuthnot laughed his short, cheerless laugh again.

"It took the form of a sanguine young man from the West," he said, "who has just come into a twelve-hundred-dollar clerkship, and feels that unending vistas of fortune lie before him. He was in such good spirits

about it that I rather lost my hold on myself, and said things I might as well have left unsaid."

"What did you say?" Richard asked.

"I told him that if he had money enough left to buy a return ticket home he had better buy one, and that if he had not I would lend it to him. I told him that at his age it wasn't a bad idea for a man to devote his time to establishing himself in some career he could depend on, and that, in default of having the energy to do that, he might reflect on the alternative of blowing his brains out as a preparation for a peaceful old age. And I told him that I had seen young fellows like himself before, and that the end had been for them what it would be for him."

"Well?" said Richard, as he had stopped.

"It wasn't any use," he answered. "I knew it would not be when I began. I simply made a spectacle of myself in a quiet way to no purpose, and as a result I am uncomfortable. It was all nonsense, but he reminded me——"

"Of what?" said Richard, since he had paused again.

A peculiar expression crossed his face.

Tredennis saw him glance at the peacock-feather screen, and as quickly glance away.

"Of—a young fellow of his age I—used to know," he answered.

"What was *his* story?" inquired Richard, with his usual desire for information. "Where is he now?"

"Dead," said Arbuthnot; and, singularly enough, he half laughed again as he tossed his cigar into the grate and went to the piano.

He began to sing in a rather low voice, and while he sang the rest listened. When he referred to his musical efforts it was his habit to treat them as but trivial performances; but he allowed them to lose none of their effectiveness through lack of care and culture. He knew wherein his power lay, and used it well. To-night, for some reason, this power was at its strongest, and, as he sang song after song, even Tredennis was compelled to acknowledge that, if it was his object to produce an emotional effect, he was in a fair way to succeed.

Richard threw himself upon a sofa and gave himself up to him with characteristic readiness to be moved, the professor stirred his tea slowly and mechanically, and Bertha

sat still in the shadow of her screen. But it was she who moved first. In the midst of one of the songs she left her seat, slowly crossed the room to the piano, and stood near it, leaning against the dark wall, her slight white figure thrown into strong relief, her hands—one of them still holding the peacock-feather screen—fallen at her sides, her eyes resting on Arbuthnot's averted face. It seemed to Tredennis that she had moved in obedience to some impulse of whose power she was scarcely conscious. He saw that she also was pale, and looked worn with fatigue, and he was filled, as he had been more than once before, with secret resentment of the fact that no one but himself appeared to notice that she had changed even within the last month.

Arbuthnot continued playing. It was evident that she had not intended to distract his attention when she approached him, and he did not look at or speak to her. As she stood listening, it seemed as if she had forgotten everything but the influence his voice exerted over her for the time being, and that she allowed it to carry her whither it would. Something in the soft, absorbed expression

of her face reminded Tredennis vaguely of the look she had worn when she turned to brood over his words on the night when he had felt nearest to her. He was thinking this when a movement from the professor attracted his attention—a jingling of the tea-spoon, a little crash, an exclamation of dismay and confusion, and the little stand had mysteriously been overturned, and the professor was ruefully bending down to pick up the fragments of his small cup and saucer.

"My dear child!" he said to Bertha, who had started forward to his rescue, "what a stupid old Vandal I am, and what an insecure little table to betray me with—and in the midst of Schubert's 'Serenade,' too, which Mr. Arbuthnot was giving us in his most effective manner! Suppose you take me up into the nursery, as an example to the children, while you dry my coat."

He went out of the room with her, his hand upon her shoulder, and Arbuthnot left the piano, and returned to the fire. The spell had been broken with the cup and saucer, and the "Serenade" remained unfinished. He produced a fresh cigar—which luxury was one of many accorded him in the household—

lighted it, and, rather to Tredennis's surprise, resumed his conversation as if there had been no pause in it.

"The fellow will be an annoyance to me every day of his life," he said, faint lines showing themselves upon his forehead in spite of the half-smile which was meant to deprive them of their significance. "I know that, confound him! He is in my room, and I shall have the benefit of every change in him, and it will be a grind — there's no denying that it will be a grind."

"I should like to know," said Tredennis, "what the changes will be."

"The changes will depend upon the kind of fellow he chances to be," said Arbuthnot. "There are two varieties. If there is a good deal in him, he will begin by being hopeful and working hard. He will think that he may make himself of value in his position and create a sort of career for himself. He will do more than is required of him, and neglect nothing. He will keep his eyes open and make friends of the men about him. He will do that for a few months, and then, suddenly, and for no fault whatever, one of these friends will be dropped out. Knowing the man to be

as faithful as himself, it will be a shock to him, and he will get anxious, and worry over it. He will see him stranded without resources—struggling to regain his place or get another, treated with amiable tolerance when he is not buffeted, snubbed, and put off. He will see him hanging about day after day, growing shabbier, more care-worn, more desperate, until he disappears and is heard of no more, and everybody is rather relieved than not. He may have been a family man, with a wife and half a dozen children all living decently on his salary. Somebody else wanted his place and got it, not because of superior fitness for it, but because the opposing influence was stronger than his. The new man will go through the same experience when his turn comes—that is all. Well, my friend will see this and be anxious, and ask questions and find out that his chances are just the same—no more and no less. He will try not to believe it, being young enough to be betrayed into the folly, and he will work harder than ever, and get over his blow a little until he sees the same thing happen again and again. Then he will begin to lose some of his good spirits; he will be a trifle irritable at times,

and lines will show themselves on his face, and he won't be so young. When he writes to the girl he is in love with,—I saw a letter addressed to some young woman out West, lying on his desk to-day,—she will notice a change in him, and the change will reveal itself more in each letter; but he will hang on and grind away, and each election will be a nightmare to him. But he will grind away. And, then, at last——"

He stopped and made a light, rather graceful gesture with his fingers.

"What then?" demanded Tredennis, with manifest impatience.

"There will be a new administration, and if he struggles through, it will be worse for him than if he were dropped, as in that case he throws away another four years of his life and all the chances for a future they might hold if he were free to avail himself of them."

Tredennis stood up, looking very large under the influence of the feeling which disturbed him. Arbuthnot himself was not entirely unimpressed by his quick movement and the energy it expressed.

"You treat the matter coolly," he exclaimed, as he rose.

Arbuthnot turned his attention to his cigar.

"Yes," he replied. "I treat it coolly. If I treated it warmly or hotly the effect produced would be about the same. My influence upon civil service is just what it might be expected to be—and no more. Its weight is easily carried."

"I beg your pardon," said Tredennis, feeling the justice and adroitness of the speech.

"Not at all," Arbuthnot answered. "It is not necessary. It makes you lose your hold on yourself to be brought face to face with the thing. It is quite natural. It has had the same effect on me, and I am a cold-blooded fellow, and a frivolous fellow into the bargain."

"I have never thought of the matter before," said Tredennis, disturbedly. "I feel as if my indifference is something to be ashamed of."

"If you give your attention as a duty to such subjects," was Arbuthnot's response, "you will be kept actively employed. If you take my advice, you will let them alone."

"The trouble is," said Tredennis, "that every one seems to let them alone."

Richard regarded him, from his place on the sofa-cushions, delightedly.

"Here's an example for you, Larry," he said. "Profit by him. Everything is an object to him—everything is worth while. He is an example to us all. Let us all profit by him."

"Oh, he began right," laughed Arbuthnot.

"He began where you began," returned Richard.

"I?" was the airy answer—"I never began at all. That is my little difficulty. I am the other one. I told you there was another one. I represent him."

Tredennis regarded him steadily. For the first time in the course of their acquaintance, he began to suspect him. His manner was too light altogether, and the odd shade which had fallen upon his eyes before during the evening showed itself again.

"Let us hear about the other one," he said.

"He is easily disposed of," was the answer. "There was nothing of him at the outset. He came to his place without an object. He liked the idea of living in Washington, and of spending his salary. We will say he was rather a well-looking young fellow, and could dance and sing a little, and talk decently well. He had no responsibilities, and never thought of the future. His salary clothed him, and

allowed him little luxuries and ordinary pleasures. He spent it when he had it, and made debts when it was gone. Being presentable, he was invited out, and made himself useful and entertaining in a small way. When he thought of the possibilities of his career being brought suddenly to a close, he was uncomfortable, so he preferred not to think of it. It is not a pleasant thing to reflect that a man has about ten years in which to begin life, and that after that he is ending it; but it is true. What he does from twenty to thirty he will be likely to find he must abide by from thirty to seventy, if he lives that long. This man, like the better one, has thrown away the years in which he might have been preparing himself to end decently. When they are gone he has nothing to show for them, and less than nothing. He is the feather upon the current, and when all is over for him, he is whirled out of sight and forgotten with the rest. And, perhaps, if he had felt there was anything to be gained by his being a steady, respectable fellow, he might have settled down into one."

He got up suddenly, with a gesture as if he would shake himself free of his mood.

"Here," he said, "I'm going! It is quite time. It's all nonsense talking it over. It is the old story. I have made myself uncomfortable for nothing. Confound you, Dick, why did you let me begin? Say good-night to the professor and Mrs. Amory for me."

"Come back!" called Richard. "Bertha will want to hear the rest of the 'Serenade' when she comes down."

"The 'Serenade'!" he said, derisively. "No, thank you. You have had enough of me, and I have had too much of myself."

He passed into the hall just as the professor descended from the nursery and through the open door. Tredennis heard what they said to each other.

"You did not finish the 'Serenade,'" said the professor.

"No," was the reply; "and I am afraid you were resigned to it, Professor."

"You were singing it very well, and with great effect," the professor responded, amicably.

"You are very kind to say so," Arbuthnot answered. "Good-night, sir."

"Good-night," replied the professor, as he entered the parlour.

As he did so, Tredennis heard the sound of

feet upon the stairs, and caught a glimpse of Bertha's white figure as she came down.

"You are not going?" he heard her say.

"Yes."

She had reached the last step by this time, and stood with her hand resting upon the balustrade, and she was paler than she had been before.

"I—" she began—"I wanted to talk to you. What is it, Larry?"

Tredennis had never heard her call him by his first name before, and he felt, with a keenness which startled him, the soft naturalness with which it fell from her lips.

Arbuthnot's voice itself had altered when he answered her.

"It is nothing," he said, "but that I am not exactly in a presentable humour, and I want to go and conceal myself. It is the best thing I can do. Good-night."

He held out his hand, touched hers lightly, and then turned away, and the door opened and closed after him, and Bertha came into the parlour, moving slowly, as if she felt tired.

CHAPTER VIII.

FEARS AND ANXIETIES

WHEN Tredennis rose to take his leave, the professor rose also.

"I will go with you," he said. "And if you will, you shall give me a few minutes of your time before going home. I have some new books to show you."

They went out together, but, until they reached the other house and entered the library, very little was said. The catastrophe of the broken tea-cup, or something of greater moment, seemed to occupy the professor's thoughts. By the time they took their accustomed chairs he appeared to have forgotten the new books. His thoughtful face wore so sadly perplexed a look that he even seemed older than usual.

Tredennis awaited his first words in silence.

His quiet fondness for him had become a very warm and tender feeling during the past months. It had been his pleasure to try to be of use to him. He had studied his needs, and endeavoured to supply them; he had managed to share hours with him which might otherwise have been lonely; he had brought to him the stir of the outside working world when he seemed to require its stimulant; he had placed his own vigour and endurance at his disposal without seeming to do so, and his efforts at making his rather lonely life a brighter and more attractive thing had not been in vain. It was to him the professor turned in his moments of fatigue and necessity, and it was to him he turned now.

"I am going to do a curious thing," he said,—"I am going to do a curious thing, but I think it is the best thing and the simplest."

"The simplest thing is always the best," said Tredennis, more because there was a pause than because he felt an answer was needed.

"Yes, yes," said the professor, seriously "I think so. And it is easier to be simple with you, my boy, than with another man.

It is your way to be direct and serious. You always had the habit. It never was your way to trifle. It is rather the fashion to trifle nowadays, you know, but you—I have always liked it in you that you were not a trifler."

"No," answered Tredennis, "I have not trifled much. It may have been against me. Sometimes I have thought it was. I cannot count it among my merits, at any rate. I am a grim fellow by nature."

"No," said the professor. "Not a grim fellow. A silent fellow, and rather unyielding with yourself, but——"

He stopped, and looked up at him with a simple affection which made the young man's heart beat as a woman's glance might have done.

"I think you know I love you," he said. "I have begun to depend on you and count you among my luxuries. I am an old man, and my luxuries are worth a great deal to me. No kindly, thoughtful act of yours has been unregarded, and I have liked your fancy for me almost as a girl likes the attentions of her first lover. Sometimes it has pleased me to be half sentimental over them, and half sentimental over you."

Tredennis flushed with pleasure and warm feeling. He rose impulsively and crossed the hearth.

"I never say things well," he said, "but I should like to try to put into words something of what I feel. You once said you wished I was your son, and I have been glad to remember it. I have no ties. Let your wish be a sort of tie between us. It is a tie I should be proud of, and glad to honour and make an object in my life. Give me what affection you can. I wish for it and need it. If I had been your son you would have counted on me: give me the pleasure and comfort of knowing you count on me now. It has somehow seemed my lot to have no place in the lives of others. Give me this, if I am worth it. I shall be better for it and happier."

The professor gave him a quiet, half-wistful glance.

"I gave it to you long ago," he said, at length. "The wish has been a tie between us from the first."

And he said it even with a touch of solemnity.

"If it had not been," he added, afterwards, "I should not have come to you with my

trouble to-night—feeling so sure that you would understand it."

He made a gesture with his hand.

"Go and walk up and down the room there, as I am used to seeing you," he said. "And I will tell you about it."

Tredennis did as he bade him—went to the other side of the room and began his measured march.

"We talked of Bertha in this very room years ago," he began. "It seems to be our lot to talk of Bertha. I am going to speak of her again."

Tredennis continued his measured tramp without speaking.

The professor rested his forehead upon his hand and sat so, looking downwards. He went on in a quiet voice, and with a quiet, absorbed manner—the manner of a man who, having the habit of close and careful study, was giving his whole attention simply and carefully to his subject.

"I shall have to go back to that night and repeat something I said then," he went on. "It was that her only hope for happiness would lie in her marriage with a man she loved deeply."

"I remember it," Tredennis answered. "And I added that the chances were that, instead, she would marry the man who loved her."

"I remember that too."

The professor sighed heavily and wearily.

"The chances were too many," he said. "She married the man who loved her."

Tredennis had marched one length of the room before he continued:

"He did love her," he said, after his pause, "tempestuously — overwhelmingly. Overwhelmingly is a good word to use. He overwhelmed her in the end. At first she liked him, but when the nature of his feeling for her began to express itself, it is my impression that she felt a secret fear of and dislike to it. She tried to avoid him, but he absolutely refused to allow it. He followed her, and was picturesquely wretched before her eyes. There is no denying he was picturesque. That was his strong point. He was picturesque and pathetic—and poetic. She was only a girl, and she was tremendously at a disadvantage before him. When she treated him badly he bore it with tender patience, and he devoted himself to her with a

faithfulness which might have touched a heart harder and more experienced than hers was, poor child! Of course his picturesque unhappiness and his poetic magnanimity told —I knew they would, and they did. Reaction set in, and she began to feel the fascination of making him happy."

He stopped, and suddenly lifted his head.

"My boy," he said, "one of the most damnable things in life is a fascination like that in the mind of a generous, ignorant creature!"

He dropped his head again.

"That is strong language," he said, "and I don't often use strong language. I—don't consider it gentlemanly, but I felt strongly at the moment, and the word is—expressive. Well, the time came when, in a moment when her mood being softer and more sympathetic than usual, and she herself, as a consequence, at a greater disadvantage than ever,—she committed herself; and then it was all over. The trouble is, that the experience of a woman of forty is what a girl needs when she chooses her husband at twenty, and, as the two things are incompatible, the chances are always against her. Bertha had the faults and follies

that I told you go to make a martyr. When she had made her mistake, she was strong and weak enough to abide by it. It is mostly imagination in matters of this kind; it was imagination in hers. She was young enough to believe in everything. She believed that, if she broke her engagement, she would break Amory's heart and ruin his life for him. There was no danger of either catastrophe, but they were realities to her, and they terrified her. Then she had never been touched by any deeper feeling than the anxious tenderness he awakened in her. She had not been given to sentiments, and, I am afraid, had regarded them rather contemptuously in others. She had no conception of a feeling stronger than herself, and held curiously obstinate and lofty views of the conduct of women who did not hold their emotions neatly in check. Her girlish bigotry was touching to me sometimes, because it was so thorough, and revealed such ignorance. I wish—I wish I could hear something of it now!"

Tredennis had reached the end of the room. He turned sharply, but recovered himself and said nothing.

"Lately," the professor added slowly, "she has been more silent on such subjects than she used to be."

He lifted his head from his hand and looked at Tredennis again.

"Philip," he said, "I—I wish to heaven chance had sent you to us that year."

Tredennis stopped in his walk, a dark and rigid figure in the shadow.

"Had sent me?" he said, in a strained voice. "Me! What—could *I* have done?"

"I—I don't know," answered the professor, "but I solemnly believe, my boy, that *if* you had come, you would have averted an evil."

"Then," said Tredennis, "I wish to God I had!"

"I say it," said the professor, "with all the more certainty, remembering, as I do, one day when she wished for you herself."

"She!" said Tredennis. "Bertha! Bertha?"

"Yes, Bertha herself. It was a few weeks before her marriage, and she had not been exactly herself for a week and more. One evening, I came into the parlour and found the room full of the odour of flowers. Amory had been with her and had left her a bouquet of heliotrope. She had some on her knee as

she sat on a low seat before the fire. When I seated myself near her, she looked up at me suddenly and said, in a rather unsteady voice: 'Papa, I have been thinking about Philip Tredennis. I have not thought of him for a long time. I should like to see him. I—wish he could come back.' She half laughed at herself as she said it, but her laugh was nervous, and when I said to her, 'Why? Were *you* great friends? I did not know that,' she tried to laugh again, and answered: 'Yes—no—not exactly. But it seems to me that he was a strong sort of person, and sensible, and—and you might rely on his decisions. It is only a fancy, I suppose—but it just came into my mind that I should like to see him again.' There is no doubt, in my mind, that she felt a need of your obstinate strength, which she did not comprehend wholly herself. I wish you had come—I wish from my soul you had!"

"I might have come if I had known," said Tredennis, in a low tone. "There was nothing—*nothing* to have stood in my way." And he turned and began his walk again.

The professor sighed, as he had sighed before—heavily and drearily.

"But you did not," he said. "And she married Amory."

"I should like to know," asked Tredennis, "if you think she is unhappy now. Do not tell me if you do not wish."

The professor's reply was very simple and direct.

"She has never been given to taking sentimental views of herself," he said, "and she is self-controlled and fond of her children, but she has never been happy for an hour since her marriage. I think the first year was very bitter to her. Amory has always been very fond of her; he is fond of her now, but her illusions concerning his passion for her soon died. She found out in two months that he would not have perished if she had discarded him. She had been his one object at first, but she was only one of a dozen others after they were married. He was amiable and delightful, but he was not always considerate. The picturesqueness of his attitude towards her was lost. He did not require her care and sympathy, and the sacrifices she made for him were very simple and natural matters in his eyes."

"In the beginning she was, perhaps,

bewildered and desperate, but, girl as she was, she was too proud and just not to see that her youth and ignorance had led her into a folly, and that the result was its natural punishment. Once she said to me, 'The worst punishments in life are the punishments for ignorance—the worst, the worst!' And I knew what she meant, though she said no more. When her first child was born, she went down to the door of death, and her physicians said there seemed to be a lack of effort. And yet, I tell you she might have been the happiest young mother in the world. When she has been near happiness at all, it has been in her quiet moments with her children. If it had not been for her children, she might have been a harder and more heartless creature than she can ever be now. If she had been something less and slighter than fate made her, she might have been either a dull nurse and housekeeper, or a vapid woman of society; in either case, she would have been happier than she is to-day. What a long story it is, and I did not think it would be so long when I began."

"I want to hear it all," broke in Tredennis,—"every word. I have not understood the

changes I saw in her. I want to understand."

"That brings me to the point of it all," was the reply. "If she had been a labourer's wife, she might have been too hard-worked to be restless, but she has had leisure, and social duties, and she has set herself deliberately the desperate task of making them her pleasures. She has found an exhilaration in them which has given her no time for regrets. She is a woman, young, attractive, and spirited. She was too full of spirit to permit herself to be subdued by her disappointment. As she cannot retrieve her mistake, she will make the best of it. She has reasoned herself into a belief that she is satisfied with what fortune has given her, and so long as that belief remains unshaken, she will be as happy as nine women out of ten are. Women are not happy, as a rule, Philip; they are not happy. I have learned that."

"But so long as her belief remains unshaken——" said Tredennis.

The professor interrupted him, gravely, sadly.

"That is the point," he said. "My fear is that it is shaken now."

Tredennis stopped in the middle of the room—stood quite still.

"She has had friends and admirers," said the professor, "scores of them. Perhaps all the more because she has cared less for them than they for her. She has a pretty trick of making the best of people, and it wins the public heart. She has friends, acquaintances, and even harmless devotees; but among them all, there is only one man who gauges her, and that man is the one who very naturally presents himself to your mind as a fair dandy, with a ready tongue and good manners."

"Arbuthnot!" exclaimed Tredennis. "Arbuthnot."

The professor smiled faintly.

"What," he said, "you recognise him at once! Well, my one vanity is my pride in my private knowledge of the thoughts of others. I am very proud of it, in a senile way. I have been studying and classifying all my life, and now I sit and look on, and treat human beings as I have treated insects. If it had not been so, I should not have known so much of Bertha. Yes, Arbuthnot. Among all the men she knows and has known

—diplomates, literati, politicians, honest men —I have found only one to disturb me, and that one Laurence Arbuthnot."

Tredennis stood still, looking down at the floor, with folded arms.

"I—" he began, "I have thought——"

The professor started.

"What!" he exclaimed. "*You* have thought? If you have thought—it must be plainer than I feared."

"No," said Tredennis, hurriedly. "Do not let that trouble you. What I have thought is so trivial and vague that it should not weigh at all. It has only been because I remembered her girlhood, and—and I thought her changed—and did not understand."

"Ah!" said the professor, letting his face fall upon both his hands. "That is not *his* trouble—*he* understands—and that is his strength. He has had his evil hour, that composed, well-dressed fellow, and he did not come out of it without scars. He covers them well, with his light overcoat and the rose in his button-hole, but they are there, and they have made him wise. He has been silent, but he has looked on too—as I have—and he has seen what others were blind to. She has

never suspected him, but his knowledge has given him power. When her *mauvais quart d'heure* has come upon her he has known what to say and what to avoid saying, and while she has not comprehended his motives, she has been grateful to him. She has liked his songs and his readiness, and his unsentimental air, and she has unconsciously learned to rely on him. Her first sincere liking for him arose from her discovery of his inconsistent and incongruous knack with the children. She had thought of him as a rather clever, selfish, well-mannered creature, and once in a juvenile crisis he surprised her by developing natural gifts — somewhat cold-blooded, but still amazingly effective. The children began to be fond of him, and his path was smoothed. She began to be fond of him herself, genuinely and simply, and if it had ended there, she would have been safer than before. But it could not end there, I suppose. The cup and saucer were not broken too soon this evening—they were not broken soon enough."

"It was not an accident?" exclaimed Tredennis.

"No, it was not an accident. I have heard

his 'Serenade' before. There is the danger. He means no harm, but his 'Serenade,' and the moments when what is past gets the better of him, and the little touches of passion his over-coat won't always cover, and the bits of sincerity he struggles against, and she ponders over, are good for neither him nor her. I have heard his 'Serenade' before, but to-night, when she got up and followed him as if he had called her, and—and she had only half heard his voice and yet must obey it; and when she stood there against the wall, with her pale face, and her soft eyes fixed on him, it was time for some common thing to happen to bring her back to life—and the cup and saucer were offered as the sacrifice."

He said it whimsically, and yet sadly.

"Poor child!" he added. "Poor child! I dare say it was hard enough."

He paused a moment, and then rose, went to Tredennis's side, and laid his hand on his shoulder.

"There—" he said,—"there is the confession, and I can make my appeal to you with fewer words."

"Your appeal?" Tredennis repeated.

"I can ask you for your help."

"If there is any help I can give which is worth the asking and giving," said Tredennis, slowly, "you know it will be yours."

"Yes, I know it will be mine, and so I ask it easily. And what I ask is this. Let us walk slowly while we talk, and I will keep my hand on your shoulder — I like to feel your support. What I would say is this: if you had been my son, you would have watched over her and stood between her and any pain which could threaten her. You know that what I fear for her now is only the desperate, hopeless misery such an experience as this would be sure to bring her if it were allowed to ripen; for her, there is nothing else to fear. No, I know I need not have said that to you."

"No," answered Tredennis, "there was no need to say it."

"She does not know herself. I know her, and know what such an experience holds for her. Better that her life should be barren to the end, than that she should bear what she must bear if her heart is once awakened."

"Better!" said Tredennis.

He felt the tremulous hand weigh heavily upon him.

"I am an old man," he was answered. "I have lived my life nearly to its close, and I say a *thousand* times better! I married a woman I did not love, and I loved a woman I could not marry."

"And you wish to ask me——" said Tredennis, breaking the short silence which followed.

"I ask you to defend her against this pain. If I were a younger and stronger man, I might do for her what I ask of you; but I cannot often be with her. You are with her day after day. She likes you."

"I have fancied," Tredennis said, "that she did *not* like me."

"It is only fancy. She sees in you the strength she vaguely longed for when she was at the turning-point of her life. Let her feel that it is always near her, and that she may rely upon it now. You are fond of her children,—talk to her of them. When you see her inclined to be silent and unlike herself, bring them to her mind; when that fellow is there, manage that she shall think of them. Her tenderness for them is your stronghold and mine. To-night, why did I take her to the nursery? Because they lay asleep there,

and when she saw them she stopped to cover them more warmly, and touch them with her hand, and bend to kiss them, and forget her 'Serenade.' She loves them better than she loves anything else on earth,—better than she could love anything else, perhaps. That's her woman's way. God made it so. That is the one help and safeguard He gave to women out of the whole bitter universe. Bring her back to her children at her saddest and weariest, and when the fight is hardest, and they will beat the rest back. It is Nature. You will do what I ask, I know."

"I shall be more at ease," he said next, "that I have asked this of you. When you are with her, I shall feel that she is safe. I trust her in your hands."

"I will try to be worthy of the trust."

"It is rather a strange one to repose in a man of your age, but I give it to you with the rest—it goes with the tie you wished for. It is a relief to me to share it with a strong fellow who can bear it well."

They talked a little longer, walking across the floor two or three times together, and then Tredennis went away. He was in a strange frame of mind. It was almost as if he had

received a blow which had partially stunned him. When he reached the street, he stood for a moment looking up at the starlit sky.

"A strong fellow," he said. "*Am* I such a strong fellow? And *I* am to stand between you and your lover—*I?* That is a strange thing, Bertha—a strange thing."

And, rousing himself suddenly, he strode down the street, and the professor, who had gone to his room, heard his military tread ringing steady and measured upon the pavement, and felt a vague comfort in the sound.

CHAPTER IX.

MOODS.

During the next few weeks, Bertha did not appear as well as usual. The change Tredennis had seen in her became more marked. She lost colour and roundness, and now and then was forced to show signs of fatigue which were not habitual with her. She made no alteration in her mode of life, however. When Tredennis called in the evening, the parlour was always full, and she was always vivaciously occupied with her guests. Chief among her attractions was counted her pet pretence of being interested in politics. It was not a very serious pretence, but being managed deftly and with a sense of its dramatic value, animated many an hour which might otherwise have been dull, in view of the social material which occasionally fell into her hands.

"What should I do," Tredennis heard her say once, "if I knew nothing of politics? There are times when they are my only salvation. What should I have done last night with the new member from Arkansas if I had not remembered that he was interested in the passage of the Currency Bill? He is an excellent, solid, sensible creature; we are frivolous, aimless beings compared with him. It is such men as he who do everything worth doing and being done; but he is purely a politician, and he has spent his life in a small provincial town, where he has been a most important person, and he cares as much for the doings of society and discussions of new novels and pictures, as I do for the linseed-oil market—if there is a linseed-oil market. When I began to ask him modest questions about his bill, his face brightened at once, and he became a self-respecting and well-informed person—at ease with himself and with me, and quite forgot his coat and his large boots, which had been slowly and painfully dawning upon him a few moments before, when he contrasted them with Mr. Arbuthnot's silk attire. My very mistakes were a pleasure to him, as they gave him an opportunity to say several things

very well worth remembering. He could not have told whether I was well or ill dressed, but he detected my flimsiness in argument in a moment, and gave me more information in half an hour than you scoffers could have given me in a week, and"—with much modesty of demeanour—"he mentioned to Senator Vaughan, in the course of the evening, that I was a most intelligent woman."

Arbuthnot and Richard burst into the laughter which was always her applause upon such occasions.

"You!" commented Arbuthnot. "You are Herodias's daughter, dancing for the head of John the Baptist. You are always dancing in a quiet and effective way for somebody's head. Whose would you like next? How does mine strike you?"

"Thank you," said Bertha. "Would you really give it to me if I danced for you in my ablest manner, and how do you think it would look on a charger?"

There was more than one hard-worked politician who, after a day of exciting debate or wearisome battling with windmills, found relief and entertainment in the pretty parlours.

Some of those who came had known Bertha in her girlhood and were friends of her father, and with these it was the fashion to encourage her to political argument, and affect the deepest confidence in her statements, with a view to drawing forth all her resources. These resources were varied and numerous, and marked by a charming feminine daring and superiority to ordinary logic, which were the delights of the senatorial mind.

"Why should I endeavour to convince you by being logical?" she said. "You have logic—at least we hope so—all day, and sometimes all night, in the Senate and the House, and even then you are not convinced of things. It is not logic which governs you, but a majority. And that is what one should aspire to, after all—not to be in the right, but to be in the majority. And I am sure one's arguments are much more untrammelled and brilliant for being illogical. And if I convince you without logic, I win a victory worth having. It is like the triumph of an ugly woman who is called a beauty. If I am pretty and you say so, it is simply as if you said 'white is white, blackness is dark'; but if I am not pretty, and am ingenious enough to

persuade you that I am—there is a triumph to be proud of!"

It was nonsense, but it was often sparkling nonsense, whose very lightness was its charm, and the rooms were rarely ever so gay and full of laughter as when there was among the guests a sprinkling of men no longer young, who had come there to forget that they were jaded, or secretly anxious, or bitterly disappointed.

"It pleases me to dance before some of them," Bertha said to Arbuthnot. "I like to think I make them forget things for a little while. If I can do nothing greater and wiser, let me employ my one small accomplishment to the best advantage, and do my harmless best to be both graceful and agile. No one can persuade me that it can be a pleasant thing to engage in a hand-to-hand conflict from three to eight months in the year, and to sit day after day placidly endeavouring to confront men who differ with you on every point, and who count the fact among their virtues, and glory in it, and watch you and listen to you, with the single object of seizing an opportunity to prove in public that you are an imbecile or a falsifier, or a happy

combination of both. When I reflect upon my own feelings," she added, with delightful *naïveté*, "when people are stupid and ill-mannered enough to differ with me, I am filled with the deepest sympathy for the entire political body. There is nothing so perfectly exasperating as to know people are differing with you, and I know there is nothing so wearing to the mind."

An exciting debate in the Senate was occupying public attention at this time, and to her other duties and entertainments she added that of following it in its course. She spent an hour or so at the Capitol every day, read the newspapers, and collected evidence and information with an unflagging industry which would have been worthy of admiration if it had been inspired by any serious intention. But she made no pretence of seriousness of intention. She returned home from such visits with derisive little arguments jotted down in her note-book, and little sketches of senatorial profile adorning its pages, and entertained a select audience with them in the evening—an audience which not infrequently included the political dignitaries themselves. Her manner would have been a mystery to

Tredennis if he had not remembered the professor's words of warning, and even with their memory in his mind, he was often at a loss. There was a restless eagerness to be amused in all she did, and he felt that, after all, she was privately less successful in her efforts than she seemed. He was, at least, relieved to find that he had but little to do in the *rôle* assigned him. When Arbuthnot appeared again, he had entirely recovered his equilibrium, and was unemotional, self-possessed, occasionally flippant, plainly cherishing, at no time, any intention of regarding himself seriously. He did not sing his "Serenade" again, and, when he sang at all, committed himself to no out-reaching warmth of feeling. He rarely spoke to Bertha alone, and the old tendency to airy derision of each other's weaknesses re-asserted itself. Only once Tredennis heard him address her with any degree of seriousness, and this was in reference to her visits to the Senate. There had been an all-night session, and it had been her whim to take part in it to the extent of sitting up until after midnight, and she had returned home more tired than she was willing to confess. Arbuthnot—who, with Richard, Tredennis, and a newspaper friend, had been

her companions in the dissipation—remonstrated with her after the little supper they had on their arrival at the house.

Bertha had left the table and was half reclining against a pile of cushions on the sofa, and Arbuthnot followed her, and spoke in a somewhat lowered voice.

"You are making a mistake in doing such things," he said. "Why will you keep it up? It's all nonsense. You don't care for it really. It is only one of your caprices. You have not a particle of serious interest in it."

"I have as much serious interest in it as I have in anything else," she answered. "More, indeed. Do you suppose I was not interested when Senator Ayres got up to-night to be immeasurably superior by the hour? It elevated my mental plane, and gave me food for reflection. It filled me with a burning desire to be immeasurably superior, too. Is he always immeasurably superior? Could he keep it up, do you suppose, in the bosom of his family—when he is putting salt on his eggs at breakfast, for instance, and thinks no one is looking? When he tries on a new hat, does he do it with a lofty air of scorn, and does he fall asleep and have the nightmare with coldly

contemptuous condescension? I don't mind mentioning to you that it is one of my favourite moods to be immeasurably superior. It is such a good way when you cannot get what you want; it disposes of your antagonists so simply, and makes you feel so deserving; but I never could keep it up—but that may be owing to weakness of character, and the fact that I am only an unworthy imitator and lack the vigour to convince myself of my own genuineness. Oh! I assure you, I was very much interested, indeed."

"Well," said Arbuthnot, "I might have expected you would say something of this kind. It is your little way of evading matters. You have a knack at it."

Bertha looked down at the footstool on which her small shoe rested, and then up at him with a quiet face.

"Yes, it is my little way," she answered. "I suppose I might count it among my few small accomplishments. But don't you think it is as good a way as any—particularly if it is the only way you have?"

"It is as good a way as any," replied Arbuthnot, with the calmness of a sensible person addressing an attractive but obstinate

child. "But you know it will not prevent my saying again what I said at first. You are very foolish to tire yourself out for nothing, and you will regret it when it is too late."

"Yes," answered Bertha, "if I regret it I shall naturally regret it when it is too late. Did you ever hear of any one's regretting a thing too early, or just in time? That is what regret means—that one is too late."

Arbuthnot sat down near her.

"If you want to talk in that style," he remarked, in the most impartial manner, "I am entirely in the mood to listen, now I have expressed my opinion. It isn't worth much as *my* opinion, but it is worth something as the truth, and I am not afraid you will forget it; but, in the meantime, until Mrs. Dacre is in the mood to be escorted home, you can pander to my lower nature by showing me the sketches you made of Senator Ayres and the Speaker, and the gentleman from Iowa who was afraid to fall asleep."

The next morning, calling with a newspaper she had wanted, Tredennis, being handed into the room in which Bertha usually spent her mornings at home, found her lying upon a sofa, and as she did not

hear him enter, he had the opportunity to stand for a few seconds and look at her.

While he did so she opened her eyes languidly and saw him, and the thought which held his mind for the moment, sprang to his lips and uttered itself.

"I do not think you know," he said, "how pale you are."

"I do not want to know," she answered, with a rather tired little smile, "if it is unbecoming, and I am sure it is. But I will ask you to excuse my getting up."

He entirely passed over the first part of her reply, as she had noticed he had a habit of passing in silence many of her speeches, though she had not been able to decide why he did so.

"You said," he went on, "that when the season was over you intended to rest. Have you been doing it lately?"

"Yes," she answered, with entirely unembarrassed readiness. "I have been very quiet indeed."

At this he was silent for a moment again, and during the pause she lay and looked at him with an expression of curious interest—trying to make up her mind whether he did

not reply because he felt himself not sufficiently ready of speech to meet her upon her own ground, or whether his silence was a negative sign of disapprobation.

"I am never tired when anything is going on," she said, at last.

"That is the worst of it," he replied.

"Oh, no—the best of it," she said, and then she looked away from him across the room, and added, in a tone altogether different, "One does not want too much time on one's hands."

Once or twice before he had seen this slight, unconscious change fall upon her, and without comprehending, had been sharply moved by it, but she always recovered herself quickly, and she did so now.

"I tried it once," she said, "and it did not agree with me, and since then I have occupied myself. As Richard says, 'one must have an object,' and mine is to occupy myself."

"You accomplish your end, at least," he remarked.

"Yes," she answered. "I congratulate myself upon that. Upon the whole, I do not know any one who is more fortunate

than I am. No other life would suit me half so well as the one I lead. I am fond of gaiety and change and freedom, and I have all three. Richard is amiable, the children are like him, and there is nothing to interfere with my having my own way, and amusing myself as I please. I should be thoroughly unhappy if I could not have my own way; to have it invariably is one of my laudable ambitions, and as I always get it, you see I have reason for being charmed with my lot."

"You are very fortunate," he said.

"I am more than fortunate," she answered. Then she broke into a little laugh. "It is rather odd," she said, "that just before you came in, I was lying thinking of the time you were in Washington before, and there came back to me something I said to you the night you gave me the heliotrope."

"Was it," said Tredennis, "what you said to me about being happy?"

"What!" she said. "You remember it? I scarcely thought that you would remember it."

"Yes," said Tredennis, "I remember it."

"I could not bear the thought of not being

happy," she went on. "It had never occurred to me that such a thing was a possibility until you said something which suggested it to me. I recollect how it startled me. It was such a new idea."

She stopped, and lay for a moment silent.

"And this morning?" suggested Tredennis.

"This morning," she answered, rather slowly, though smiling as she spoke, "this morning, as I said, I decided that I had been very fortunate."

"Then," he said, "you *have* been happy."

"If I had not been," she answered, "it would have been very curious. I have never been interfered with in the least."

"That is happiness indeed," said Tredennis.

Just now he was reflecting upon the fact that all their conversations took the same turn and ended in the same way. It mattered little how they began; in all cases she showed the same aptitude for making her subject an entirely inconsequent source of amusement. Experience was teaching him that he need expect nothing else. And even as he was thinking this, he heard her laugh faintly again.

"Shall I tell you what I see in your face,"

she said—"what I see oftener than anything else?"

"I should be glad to know," he replied.

"I see that you are thinking that I am very much changed, and that it is not for the better."

He paused a moment before he answered her, and when he did so he spoke with his eyes fixed on the floor, and slowly:

"You are not the Bertha I used to know," he said. "But that I should have allowed myself to expect it shows simply that I am a dull, unprogressive fellow."

"It shows that you are very amiable and sanguine," she said. "I should have been even more fortunate than it has been my fate to be if I had not changed in ten years. Think of the good fortune of having stood still so long—of having grown no older, no wiser. No," in a lower voice, "I am not the Bertha you used to know."

But the next instant, almost as soon as she had uttered the words, she lifted her eyes with the daring little smile in them.

"But I am very well preserved," she said. "I am really very well preserved. I am scarcely wrinkled at all, and I manage to

conceal the ravages of time. And, considering my years, I am quite active. I danced every dance at the Ashworths' ball, with the kindly assistance of Mr. Arbuthnot and his friends. There were *débutantes* in the room who did not dance half as often. The young are not what they were in my generation—though probably the expiring energies of advanced age are flaming in the socket and——"

She stopped suddenly, letting her hands drop at her sides. "No," she said again, "I—I am not the Bertha you used to know—and this morning I am—tired enough to be obliged to admit it."

Tredennis took a quick step towards her; the hot blood showed itself under his dark skin. What he had repressed in the last months got the better of him so far, that he had no time to reflect that his stern, almost denunciatory, air could scarcely be ranked among ordinary conventionalities, and that an ordinarily conventional expression of interest might have been more reasonably expected from him than a display of emotion, denunciatory or otherwise.

"Can you expect anything else?" he said.

"Is your life a natural one? Is it a natural and healthy thing that every hour of it should contain its own excitement, and that you should not know what simple, normal rest means? Who could be blind to the change which has taken place in you during the last few weeks? Last night you were so tired and unstrung that your hand trembled when you lifted your glass to your lips. Arbuthnot told you then it was a mistake—I tell you now that it is worse—it is madness and crime."

He had not thought of what effect he would produce—his words were his indignant masculine protest against her pallor and weakness, and the pain he had borne in silence for so long. It seemed, however, that he had startled her singularly. She rose from her reclining posture slowly, and sat upright—and her hands trembled more than they had done the night before.

"Why," she faltered, "why are you so angry?"

"That," he returned bitterly, "means that I have no right to be angry, of course! Well, I am willing to admit it—I have no right. I am taking a liberty. I don't even suggest that you are making a mistake—as Mr.

Arbuthnot did; I am rough with you, and say something worse."

"Yes." she admitted, "you are very rough with me." And she sat a few moments, looking down at the floor, her little hands trembling on her lap. But presently she moved again. She pushed one of the cushions up in the sofa-arm and laid her cheek against it, with a half-sigh of weariness relieved and a half-smile.

"Go on!" she said, "After all—since I have reflected—I think I don't dislike it. New things always please me—for a little while—and this is new. No one ever spoke to me so before. I wonder whether it was because I did not really deserve it or because people were afraid?"

Tredennis stopped in the walk he had begun and wheeled sharply about, fronting her with his disproportionately stern gaze.

"Do you want to know why *I* do it?" he demanded. "I think—since I have reflected—that it is for the sake of—of the other Bertha."

There was a slight pause.

"Of the other Bertha," she said after it, in a low, unsteady tone. "Of the Bertha who

thought it an impossibility that she should be anything but happy."

He had not been prepared for her replies before, but he was startled by what she did now. She left her seat with a sudden, almost impassioned, action; the cushion fell upon the floor. She put her hand upon the mantel, as if to support herself.

"Why did you say that?" she exclaimed. "I do not like it! I do not like to be reminded that it is so long since—since I was worth liking. I suppose that is what it means. Why should you seem to accuse me when you say you speak for the sake of the other Bertha? Am I so bad? You have lived a quiet life because you liked it best—I did not chance to like it best, and so I have been gay. I go out a great deal and am fond of the world, but do I neglect my children and treat my husband badly? Richard is very happy, and Jack and Janey and Meg enjoy themselves and are very fond of me. If I was careless of them, and ill-tempered to Richard, and made my home unhappy, you might accuse me. It is the most mysterious thing to me, but I always feel as if I was defending myself against you, even when you only look at me

and do not speak at all. It—it is a curious position! I do not understand it, and I do not like it!"

Her sudden change of mood was a revelation to Tredennis. He began to realise what he had dimly felt from the first—that her mental attitude towards him was one of half-conscious defiance of his very thought of her. He had not known why he had felt at times that his mere presence prompted her to present her worldly, mocking little philosophies in their most incontrovertible and daring form—and that it was her whim to make the worst of herself and her theories for his benefit. He accused himself angrily in secret of over-estimating his importance in her eyes, and had reiterated impatiently that there was no reason why she should be at all specially aware of his existence when he was near her, and it had been one of his grievances against himself that, in spite of this, every time they met he had felt the same thing, and had resented and been puzzled by it.

But he had never before seen her look as she looked now. One of his private sources of wonder had been the perfect self-control which restrained her from exhibiting anything

approaching a shadow of real feeling upon any subject. He had seen her under circumstances which would have betrayed nine women out of ten into some slight display of irritation, and she had always maintained the airy serenity of demeanour which deprived all persons and incidents of any weight whatever when they assumed the form of obstacles, and her practicable little smile and calm impartiality of manner had never failed her. He had heard her confess that it was her chief weakness to pride herself upon her quiet adroitness in avoiding all things unpleasant or emotional, and upon her faithfulness to her resolve not to permit herself to be disturbed.

"I have seen people who enjoyed their emotions," she had said, "but I never enjoyed mine, even when I was very young. I definitely disliked them. I am too self-conscious to give myself up to them simply. If I had one, I should think about it and analyse it and its effects upon me. I should be saying all the time, 'Now I am hot—now I am cold'; and when it was over I should be tired, not only of the feeling itself, but of taking my own temperature."

And now she stood before him for the instant a new creature—weaker and stronger than he had dreamed it possible she could be—her eyes bright with some strange feeling, a spot of colour burning on each pale cheek. He was so bewildered and impressed that he was slow to speak, and, when he began, felt himself at so severe a disadvantage that his consciousness of it gave his voice a rigid sound.

"I do not think," he began, "that I know what to say——"

Bertha stopped him.

"There is no need that you should say anything," she interrupted. "You cannot say anything which will disapprove of me more than your expression does. And it is not you who should defend yourself, but I. But you were always severe. I remember I felt that when I was only a child, and knew that you saw all that was frivolous in me. I was frivolous then as I am now. I suppose I have a light nature—but I do not like to be reminded of it. After all, no one is harmed but myself, and it would be charity in you to let me go my flippant way and not despise me too much."

"Bertha," he answered, "it is not for me to say that I do not despise you."

He stood with his arms folded and looked down at her steadily. It was very easy for her to place him at a disadvantage. He knew nothing of feminine ways and means, and his very masculine strength and largeness were against him. If she gave him a wound he could not strike back or would not—and in her last speech she had given him more wounds than one, and they were rankling in his great breast fiercely. And yet despite this it was not she who came off entirely victor. After meeting his gaze with undeniable steadiness for a few seconds, she turned away.

"I told you," she remarked, with a persistence which was its own betrayer, "that—it was not necessary for you to say anything." The next moment an impatient laugh broke from her. She held up her unsteady hand that he might see it.

"Look!" she said. "Why should I quarrel with you when you are right, after all? It is certainly time that I should rest when I am so absurdly unstrung as this. And my very mood itself is a proof that something should

be done with me. For a minute or so I have actually been out of temper—or something humiliatingly like it. And I pride myself upon my temper, you know, and upon the fact that I never lose it—or have not any to lose. I must be worn out when a few perfectly truthful speeches will make me bad-tempered. Not that I object to it on moral grounds, but it wounds my vanity to lose control of myself. And now I have reached my vanity I am quite safe. I will leave for Fortress Monroe to-morrow."

"It would be better if you went to a quieter place," he said.

"Thank you," she answered. "I think it will be quiet enough—if I take the children and avoid the ball-room, and am very decorous."

There seemed but little more for him to say. She changed the subject by taking from the table the paper he had brought her, and beginning to discuss its contents.

"Richard asked me to read the editorial and the letter from the Washington correspondent," she said. "He is more interested in the matter than I ever knew him to be in anything of the kind before. He is actually

making it one of his objects, and flatters me by wanting to know my opinions and wishing me to share his enthusiasm." She sat down to the table, with the paper open before her and her hands lying clasped upon it.

"Have you read it?" she asked. "Is it very clever? Can I understand it? Richard is so amiably sure I can."

"It is well done," replied Tredennis, "and you will certainly understand it."

"I am glad of that," she said, and sat still a moment, with eyes lowered. Then she spoke, rather suddenly. "Richard is very good to me," she said. "I ought to be very grateful to him. It is just like him to feel that what I think of such things is worth hearing. That is his affectionate, generous way. Of what value could my shallow little fancies be?—and yet I think he really believes they should carry weight. It is the most delightful flattery in the world."

"It is your good fortune," said Tredennis, "to be able to say things well and with effect."

"What!" she said, with a half-smile, "are you going to flatter me, too?"

"No," he answered, grimly, "I am not going to flatter you.'

"You would find it a very good way," she answered. "We should get along much better, I assure you. Perhaps that is really what I have been resenting so long—that you show no facility for making amiable speeches."

"I am afraid my facility lies in the opposite direction," he returned.

"I have recovered my equilibrium sufficiently not to admit that," she said.

When he went away, as he did shortly after, she followed him to the door of the room.

"Was I very bad-tempered?" she said, softly. "If I was, suppose you forgive me before you go away—for the sake of the other Bertha."

He took the hand she offered him, and looked down at it as it lay upon his big brown palm. It was feverish and still a little unsteady, though her manner was calm enough.

"There is nothing to forgive," he answered. "If there was—this Bertha—" He checked himself, and ended abruptly. "I don't share your gift," he said. "I said my say as bluntly and offensively as possible, I suppose, and you

had a right to be angry. It was all the worse done because I was in earnest."

"So was I—for a moment," she said; "that was the trouble."

And that was the end of it, though even when he dropped her hand and turned away, he was aware of her slender figure standing in the door-way, and of a faint, inexplicable shadow in the eyes that followed him.

He went back to his quarters bitterly out of humour with himself.

"A nice fellow I am to talk to women!" he said. "I have not lived the life to fit me for it. Military command makes a man authoritative. What right had I to seem to assume control over her? She's not used to that kind of thing, even from those who might be supposed to have the right to do it. Some one ought to have the right—though that has gone out of fashion, too, I suppose." Something like a groan burst from him as he laid his forehead upon his hands, resting his elbows on the table before him. "If a man loved her well enough," he said, "he might do it and never hurt her; but if she loved him, perhaps there would be no need of it."

He had passed through many such brief

spasms of resentful misery of late, and he was beginning to acknowledge to himself that each one was stronger than the last. He had contended his ground with steady persistence and with stubborn condemnation of his own weakness, but he had lost it, inch by inch, until there were times when he felt his foothold more insecure than he could have believed possible a year ago.

"Why should I think of myself as a man who has lost something?" he was wont to say to himself, bitterly and impatiently. "I had won nothing, and might never have won it. I had what would have been opportunity enough for a quicker temperament. It is nothing but sentiment."

And, even as he said it, there would come back to him some tone of Bertha's voice, some pretty natural turn of her head or figure as she sat or stood in the parlour with her small court around her, and, slight as the memory might be, the sudden leap of his pulses had more power than his argument.

It was these trifles and their habit of haunting him which were harder to combat than all the rest. His life had been so little affected by femininity that hers had a

peculiarly persistent influence upon him. He noted in her things he might have seen in scores of other women, but half-fancied belonged specially to herself. The sweep and fall of her dress, the perfume she used, the soft ruffles of lace she was given to wearing—each of her little whims of adornment had its distinct effect, and seemed, in some mysterious way, to have been made her own, and to be shared with no other being. Other women wore flowers; but what flowers had ever haunted him as he had been haunted by the knot of heliotrope and violets he had seen her tuck carelessly into the belt of her dress one day? He had remembered them with a start again and again, and each time they had bloomed and breathed their soft scent afresh.

"It is all sentiment," he persisted. "There would be nothing new in it to—to that fellow Arbuthnot, for instance: but it is new to me, and I can't get rid of it, somehow."

He had heard in his past stories of men who cherished as treasures for a life-time a ribbon or a flower, and had passed them by in undisturbed composure as incidents belonging only to the realms of wild romance; but he

had never in the course of his existence felt anything so keen as the inconsequent thrill which was the result of his drawing suddenly from his pocket one night, on his return to his quarters after a romp with the children, a small, soft, long-wristed glove which it had been Master Jack's pleasure to hide there.

He had carried it sternly back the next morning and returned it to Bertha, but the act cost him an effort; it had been like a living presence in his room the night before, and he had slept less well because of it.

He had used his very susceptibility to these influences as an argument against his feeling.

"There is nothing substantial in it," he had said,—"nothing but what a man should find it easy to live down. It is the folly of a boy, intoxicated by the colour of a girl's cheek and the curl of her hair. An old fellow, who any day may find a sprinkling of gray in his scalp-lock, should know better than to ponder over a pretty gown and—a bunch of flowers; and yet how one remembers them!"

And to-day it was the little things, as usual, almost as much as the great ones. The

memory of the small, bright room, with its air of belonging to Bertha, and being furnished by Bertha, and strewed with appendages of Bertha; the slight figure, in its white morning dress, lying upon the sofa or standing between the folding-doors; the soft, full knot of her hair as he saw it when she turned her head proudly away from him—what trifles they were! And yet if the room had been another, and the pretty dress not white, and the soft hair coiled differently, everything might have had another effect, and he might have been in another mood — or so he fancied.

But he gave himself little leisure for the indulgence of his fancies, and he made his usual effort to crush them down and undervalue them. His groan was followed by a bitter laugh.

"It is the old story," he said. "I please myself by fancying that what would please me would make her happier. Arbuthnot would know better. Control would not suit her—even the gentlest. She has had her own way too long. She is a small, slight creature, but it has been her lot to rule all her life, in a small, slight creature's way. It

is the natural sentimentality of an obstinate, big-boned fellow to fancy she would thrive under it. She would know better herself. She would laugh the thought to scorn, and be wise in doing it."

CHAPTER X.

THE WESTORIA BILL.

As he was saying it, Bertha had gone back to her sofa, and sat there with the faint, troubled smile still on her face.

"He was angry," she said, "and so was I. It made him look very large, but I was not at all afraid of him—no, positively, I was not afraid of him, and I am glad of that. It is bad enough to remember that I was emotional, and said things I did not mean to say. It is not like me to say things I don't mean to say. I must be more tired out than I knew. Ah, there is no denying that he was in the right! I will go away and stay some time. It will be better in every way."

For some minutes she sat motionless, her hands clasped lightly upon her knee, her eyes fixed on a patch of sunlight on the carpet. She did not move, indeed, until she heard

the sound of her husband's foot upon the steps and his latch-key in the door. He entered the room immediately afterwards, looking rather warm and a trifle exhilarated, and all the handsomer in consequence.

"Ah, Bertha, you are here!" he said. "I am glad you were not out! How warm it is! Fancy having such weather early in May! And three days ago we had fires. What a climate! There is something appropriate in it. It is purely Washingtonian, and as uncertain as—as senators. There's a scientific problem for the Signal Service Bureau to settle,—Does the unreliability of the climate affect the senatorial mind, or does the unreliability of the senatorial mind affect the climate?"

"It sounds like a conundrum," said Bertha, "and the Signal Service Bureau would give it up. You have been walking too fast, you foolish boy, and have over-heated yourself. Come and lie down on the sofa and rest."

She picked up the cushion, which had fallen, and put it in place for him. There was always a pretty touch of maternal care for him in her manner. He accepted her invitation with delighted readiness, and, when

he had thrown himself at luxurious full length upon the sofa, she took a seat upon its edge near him, having first brought from the mantel a large Japanese fan, with which she stirred the air gently.

"Why were you glad that I had not gone out?" she said. "Did you want me?"

"Oh!" he answered, "I always want you. You are the kind of little person one naturally wants—and it is a sort of relief to find you on the spot. How nice this Grand Pasha business is—lying on cushions and being fanned—and how pretty and cool you look in your white frills! White is very becoming to you, Bertha."

Bertha glanced down at the frills.

"Is it?" she said. "Yes, I think it is, and this is a pretty gown. Richard!"

"Well?"

"You said it was a sort of relief to find me on the spot. Did you say it because I am not always here when you want me? Do you think I go out too much? Does it ever seem to you that I neglect you a little, and am not quite as domesticated as I should be? Should you be—happier—if I lived a quieter life and cared less for society?"

There was a touch of unusual earnestness in her voice, and her eyes were almost childishly eager as she turned them upon him.

"Happier!" he exclaimed gaily. "My dear child! I could not easily be happier than I am. How could I accuse you of neglecting me? You satisfy me exactly in everything. Whose home is more charming, and whose children are better cared for than mine? It is not necessary for you to cook my dinner, but you are the most delightful sauce to it in the world when you sit at the head of the table. What more could a man want?"

"I—I don't know," she said slowly, "but I could not bear to think that I was not what I should be in my own home. It has always seemed to me that there could be no bad taste and bad breeding so inexcusable as the bad taste and bad breeding of a woman who is disagreeable and negligent in her own house. One has no need to put it on moral grounds even—the bad taste of it is enough. I don't think I could ever be disagreeable—or that you could think me so—but it struck me——"

"Don't let it strike you again," he interrupted, amiably. "It has struck me that

there were never two people so well suited to each other as our married life has proved us to be. I don't mind admitting now that one or twice during the first year I thought that you were a little restless or unhappy, but it was when you were not well, and it was quite natural, and it all passed away, and I don't think it would occur to any one in these days to ask whether you are happy or not."

Bertha was playing with his watch-chain, and she separated one charm upon it from another carefully as she answered him in a soft, natural voice:

"There is a legend, you know," she said, "that the first year of one's marriage is always uncomfortable."

"Oh, mine was not uncomfortable," he returned,—"it was delightful, as all the other years have been; but—just occasionally, you know—there was a—well, a vague something—which never troubles me now."

"I must have behaved badly in some way," said Bertha, smiling, "or it would not have troubled you then."

And she stooped and kissed him on the forehead.

"I have a horrible conviction," she said after it, "that I was a vixen. Was I a vixen? Perhaps I was a vixen, and never suspected it—and no one suspected it but you. Poor boy! Why didn't you return me to papa with thanks? Well, as you have kept me so long, you must make the best of me. And it is very nice and polite in you to pretend that I am satisfactory, and don't make you wretched and your hearth a wilderness by being a hollow worldling."

"You are exactly what I want," he responded. "I am a hollow worldling myself. If I were a bricklayer, my idea of domestic bliss might be to spend my evenings at home and watch you mending stockings or knitting, or doing something of that sort, but even then I am afraid I should tire of it, and secretly long for something more frivolous."

"For something as frivolous as I am?" she said, with a nervous little laugh. "Quite as frivolous, Richard—really? But I know you will say so. You are always good to me and spoil me."

"No, I am not," he answered. "It is simply true that you always please me. It is true I am a rather easy-natured fellow, but I

know plenty of good-natured fellows whose wives are terribly unsatisfactory. You are clever and pretty, and don't make mistakes, and you are never exacting, nor really out of humour, and it is impossible for me to tire of you——"

"Really?" she said, quickly. "Is that last true?"

"Entirely true."

"Well," she commented, the colour rising in her cheek, "that is a good deal for one's husband to say! That is a triumph. It amounts to a certificate of character."

"Well," he admitted, after a second's reflection, "upon the whole it is! I know more husbands than one—but no matter. I was going to add that long ago—before I met you, you know—my vague visions of matrimonial venture were always clouded by a secret conviction that when I had really passed the Rubicon and had time for reflection, things might begin to assume a rather serious aspect."

"And I," said Bertha, a little thoughtfully, "have never assumed a serious aspect."

"Never," he replied, exultantly. "You have been a perfect success. There is but one Bertha——"

"And her husband is her prophet!" she added. "You are very good to me, Richard, and it is entirely useless for you to deny it, because I shall insist upon it with—with wild horses if necessary—which figure of speech I hope strikes you as being strong enough."

She was herself again—neither eager nor in earnest, ready to amuse him and to be amused, waving her fan for his benefit, touching up his cushions to make him more comfortable, and seeming to enjoy her seat on the edge of his sofa very much indeed.

"Do you know," she said at length, "what I have thought of doing? I have thought quite seriously of going in a day or so to Fortress Monroe, with the children."

She felt that he started slightly, and wondered why.

"Are you surprised?" she asked. "Would you rather I would not go?"

"No," he answered, "if you think it would be better for you. You are tired, and the weather is very warm. But—have you set any particular day?"

"No," she said, "I should not do that without speaking to you first."

"Well," he returned, "then suppose you do

not go this week. I have half invited Senator Planefield, and Macpherson and Ashley to dinner for Thursday."

"Is it because you want them to talk about the bill?" she said. "How interested you are in it, Richard! Why is it? Railroads never struck me as being particularly fascinating material. It seems to me that amateur enthusiasm would be more readily awakened by something more romantic and a little intangible—a tremendous claim, for instance, which would make some poor, struggling creatures fabulously rich. I am always interested in claims—the wilder they are the better, and it invariably delights me when the people get them 'through,' to the utter consternation of the Government. It has faintly dawned upon me on two or three such occasions that I have no political morality, and I am afraid it is a feminine failing. It is not a masculine one, of course, so it must be feminine. I wish you had chosen a claim, Richard, instead of a railroad. I am sure it would have been far more absorbing."

"The railroad is quite absorbing enough," he answered, "and there is money enough involved in it. Just think of those Westoria

lands, and what they will be worth if the road is carried through them—and as to romance, what could be more romantic than the story attached to them?"

"But I don't know the story," said Bertha. "What is it?"

"It is a very effective story," he replied, "and it was the story which first called my attention to the subject. There was a poor, visionary fellow whose name was Westor, to whom a large tract of this land came suddenly as an inheritance from a distant relative. He was not practical enough to make much use of it, and he lived in the house upon it in a desolate, shiftless way for several years, when he had the ill-fortune to discover coal on the place. I say it was ill-fortune, because the discovery drove him wild. He worked, and starved, and planned, and scraped together all the money he could to buy more land, keeping his secret closely for some time. When he could do no more he came to Washington, and began to work for a railroad which would make his wealth available. His energy was a kind of frenzy, they say. He neither ate, slept, nor rested, and really managed to get the matter into active movement. He managed

to awaken a kind of enthusiasm, and, for a short time, was a good deal talked of and noticed. He was a big, raw-boned young Westerner, and created a sensation by his very uncouthness in its connection with the wildly fabulous stories told about his wealth. He had among his acquaintances a man of immense influence, and at this man's house he met the inevitable young woman. She amused herself, and he fell madly in love, and became more frenzied than ever. It was said that she intended to marry him if he was successful, and that she made his poor, helpless life such an anguish to him that he lost his balance entirely. There came a time when he was entirely penniless, and his prospects were so unpromising, and his despair so great, that he went to his boarding-house one day with the intention of killing himself, and just as he finished loading his pistol a letter was handed in to him, and when he opened it he found it contained the information that another distant relative, affected by the rumours concerning him, had left him twenty thousand dollars. He laid his pistol in a drawer, and left the house to begin again. He had an interview with his lady-love, and

one with his man of influence, and at the end of a few weeks had bought more land, and parted in some mysterious way with the rest of his money, and was on the very eve of success. Poor fellow!"

"Poor fellow!" said Bertha. "Oh! don't say that anything went wrong!"

"It would not be half so dramatic a story if everything had gone right," said Richard, with fine artistic appreciation. "You could never guess what happened. Everything he did seemed to work to a miracle; every train was laid and every match applied. On the day that was to decide his fate he did not go near the Capitol, but wandered out and took his place on one of the seats in the park which faced the house at which the young woman was visiting, and sat there, a lank, unshorn, haggard figure, either staring at her window or leaning forward with his head upon his hands. People actually heard of his being there and went to look at him, and came away without having dared to address him. The young woman looked out from behind her blind and was furious, and even sent word to him to go away. But he would not go, and only glared at the man who was

sent to him with the message. He sat there until night, and then staggered across and rang at the bell, and inquired for the man of influence, and was told—what do you suppose he was told?"

"Oh!" cried Bertha, desperately, "I don't know."

"He was told that he was occupied."

"Occupied!" echoed Bertha.

Richard clasped his hands comfortably and gracefully behind his head.

"That's the climax of the story," he said. "He was occupied—in being married to the young woman, of whom he had been greatly enamoured for some time, and who had discreetly decided to marry him because he had proved to her that the other man's bill could not possibly pass. It could not pass because he had the energy and influence to prevent its doing so, and he prevented its passing because he knew he would lose the young woman otherwise. At least that is the story, and I like the version."

"I don't like it!" said Bertha. "It makes me feel desperate."

"What it made the poor fellow feel," Richard went on, "nobody ever found out, as he said

nothing at all about it. On hearing the truth he sat down on the steps for a few minutes, and then got up and went away. He went to his boarding-house and had an interview with his landlady, who was a kind-hearted creature, and when she saw him began to cry because his bill had not passed. But when she spoke of it she found he knew nothing of it—he had never asked about it, and he said to her, 'Oh! that doesn't matter—it isn't any consequence particularly; I'm only troubled about *your* bill. I haven't money enough to pay it. I've only enough to take me home, and you'll have to let me give you the things I have in my room for pay. I only want one thing out of there—if you'll let me go and get it, I won't take anything else.' So she let him go, and stood outside his door and cried, while he went in and took something out of a drawer."

"Richard!" cried Bertha.

"Yes," said Richard. "He actually found a use for it after all—but not in Washington. He went as far as he could by rail, and then he tramped the rest of the way to Westoria—they say it must have taken him several days, and that his shoes were worn to shreds, and his feet cut and bruised by the walk. When he

reached the house, it had been shut up so long that the honeysuckle which climbed about it had grown across the door, and he could not have got in without breaking or pushing it aside. People fancied that at first he thought of going in, but that when he saw the vine it stopped him—slight barrier as it was. They thought he had intended to go in, because he had evidently gone to the door, and before he turned away had broken off a spray of the flowers which was just beginning to bloom—he held it crushed in his hand when they found him two or three days later. He had carried it back to the edge of the porch, and had sat down—and finished everything—with the only thing he had brought back from Washington—the pistol. How does that strike you as the romance of a railroad?"

Bertha clenched her hand, and struck her knee a fierce little blow.

"Richard," she said, "if that had happened in my day, I should have turned lobbyist, and every thought and power and gift I had would have been brought to bear to secure the passage of that bill."

Richard laughed—a pleased but slightly nervous laugh.

"Suppose you bring them to bear now," he suggested.

"There would not be any reason for my doing it now," she answered, "but I shall certainly be interested."

Richard laughed again.

"By Jove!" he said, "the poor devils who own it would think there was reason enough!"

"Who owns it?"

"Several people who speculated in it because the railroad was talked of again, and on a more substantial footing. It fell to Westor's only living relation, who was an ignorant old woman, and sold it without having any idea of its real value. Her impression was that, if she kept it, it would bring her ill-luck. There is no denying that it looks just now like a magnificent speculation."

"And that poor fellow," said Bertha,—"that *poor* fellow——"

"That poor fellow?" Richard interposed. "Yes—but his little drama is over, you know, and perhaps there are others going on quite as interesting, if we only knew them. It is very like you, Bertha—and it is very adorable," touching her shoulder caressingly with his

hand, "to lose sight entirely of the speculation and care only for the poor fellow. You insist upon having your little drama under all circumstances."

"Yes," she admitted. "I confess that I like my little drama, and I have not a doubt that—as I said before—I could not have lived in the midst of that without turning lobbyist—which is certainly not my vocation."

"Not your vocation?" said Richard. "You would make the most successful little lobbyist in the world!"

Bertha turned upon him an incredulous and rather bewildered smile.

"I!" she exclaimed. "I?"

"Yes, you!"

"Well," she replied, after a second's pause given to inspection of him, "*this* is open derision!"

"It is perfectly true," was his response, "and it is true for good reasons. Your strength would lie in the very fact that you would be entirely unlike your co-labourers in the field. You have a finished little air of ingenuousness which would be your fortune."

She shook her head with a pretty gesture.

"No," she said. "I am very clever, and of course you cannot help observing it, but I am not clever enough for that."

He gave her a glance at once curious and admiring.

"By Jove!" he exclaimed, "it is my belief you are clever enough for anything."

"Richard," she said, "shall I tell you a secret?"

"Yes."

"And you will bury it in the innermost recesses of your soul, and *never* divulge it?"

"Certainly."

"And brace yourself for a shock when I reveal it to you?"

"Yes."

"Well, here it is! My cleverness is like what you—and two or three other most charming people—are good enough to call my prettiness. It is a delusion and a snare!"

"Come!" he said. "You are attemping to deceive me."

"No," she answered. "I am attempting to undeceive you. I am not really pretty or clever at all, and it has been the object of my life to prevent its being detected."

She opened her eyes in the most charmingly ingenuous manner and nodded her head.

"I discovered it myself," she said, "long ago—comparatively early in life—and resolved to conceal it. And nothing but the confidence I repose in you would have induced me to mention it."

"Well," he replied, "you have concealed it pretty well under the circumstances."

"Ah!" she said, "but you don't know what a burden it is to carry about, and what subterfuges I have to resort to when I seem on the very verge of being found out. There is Larry, for instance—I am almost sure that Larry suspects me, especially when I am tired, or chance to wear an unbecoming gown. You know how particular I am about my gowns? Well, that is my secret. I haven't an attraction, really, but my gowns and my spirits and my speciousness. The solitary thing I do feel I have reason to pride myself on is that I am bold enough to adapt my gowns in such a way as to persuade you that I am physically responsible for the colour and shape of them. You fancy you are pleased with me when you are simply pleased with some colour of which I exist on the reflection

or glow. In nine cases out of ten, it is merely a matter of pale blue or pink, and silk or *crèpe* or cashmere; and in the tenth it is nothing but spirits and speciousness."

"Oh," he said, "there is no denying that you would make a wonderful lobbyist."

"Well," she answered, rising and going to the table to lay her fan down, "when you invest largely in Westoria lands and require my services in that capacity, I will try to distinguish myself. I think I should like to begin with the Westoria lands if I begin at all. But in the meantime I must go up stairs and talk to the seamstress about Janey's new white dresses. You are cool enough now to enjoy your lunch when the bell rings, and you shall have some iced tea if you would like it."

"I would like it very well, and—by the by, did Tredennis bring the 'Clarion,' as he said he would?"

"Yes—it is here," and she handed it to him from the table. "You can read it while I am up stairs."

"Have you read it?" he said, opening it and turning to the editorial.

"Not yet. I shall read it this afternoon."

"Yes, do. The facts are put very forcibly. And—you will decide not to go to Fortress Monroe just yet?"

She hesitated a moment, but he did not observe it.

"I must be here when your friends dine with you, of course," she said. "And a week or even a little more does not make so much difference, after all. It may be quite cool again to-morrow.'

And she went out of the room and left him to his paper.

CHAPTER XI.

AN APPEAL TO ARBUTHNOT.

It was two weeks after this that Arbuthnot, sauntering down the avenue in a leisurely manner, on his way from his office, and having a fancy to stroll through Lafayette Park, which was looking its best in its spring bravery and bloom, on entering the iron gateway found his attention attracted by the large figure of Colonel Tredennis, who was approaching him from the opposite direction, walking slowly and appearing deeply abstracted. It cannot be said that Mr. Arbuthnot felt any special delight in the prospective encounter. He had not felt that he had advanced greatly in Colonel Tredennis's good opinion, and had, it must be confessed, resigned himself to that unfortunate condition of affairs without making any particular effort

to remedy it—his private impression being that the result would scarcely be likely to pay for the exertion, taking into consideration the fact that he was constitutionally averse to exertion.

"Why," he had said to Bertha, "should I waste my vital energies in endeavouring to persuade a man that I am what he wants, when perhaps I am not? There are scores of people who will naturally please him better than I do, and there are people enough who please me better than he does. Let him take his choice—and it is easy enough to see that I am not his choice."

"What is he thinking of now, I wonder?" he said, a vague plan for turning into another walk flitting through his mind. "Are his friends, the Piutes, on the war-path and actively engaged in dissecting agents, or is he simply out of humour? He is not thinking of where he is going. He will walk over that nursemaid and obliterate the twins—yes, I thought so."

The colonel had verified his prophecy, and aroused from his reverie by the devastation he had caused, he came to a stand-still with a perplexed and distressed countenance.

"I beg your pardon," Arbuthnot heard him say, in his great, deep voice. "I hope I did not hurt you. I had forgotten where I was." And he stooped and set the nearest twin on its feet on the grass and then did the same thing for the other, upon which both stood and stared at him, and not being hurt at all, having merely rolled over on the sod, were in sufficiently good spirits to regard with interest the fact that he was fumbling in his coat-pocket for something.

The article in question was a package of bonbons, which he produced and gave to the nearest toddler.

"Here!" he said. "I bought these for another little girl, but I can get some more. They are all right," he added, turning to the mulatto girl, whose admiration of his martial bearing revealed itself in a most lenient grin, —"they won't hurt them. They can eat them all without being harmed."

And then he turned away, and in doing so caught sight of Arbuthnot, and, somewhat to the surprise of the latter, advanced towards him at once with the evident intention of joining him.

"It is rather a curious thing that I should

meet you here," he said. "I was thinking of you when I met with the catastrophe you saw just now. Do you often go home this way?"

"Not very often," Arbuthnot replied. "Sometimes, when things look as they do now," with a gesture indicating the brilliant verdure.

"Everything looks very fresh and luxuriant," said Tredennis. "The season is unusually far advanced, I suppose. It is sometimes a great deal too warm to be pleasant."

"It will be decidedly warmer every day," said Arbuthnot. "We shall have a trying summer. The President is going out to the Soldiers' Home next week—which is earlier than usual. There are only two or three of the senators' families left in the city. The exodus began weeks ago."

"Such weather as we have had the last few days," said the colonel, with his slight frown, "must be very exhausting to those who are not strong, and who have gone through a gay winter."

"The best thing such people can do," responded Arbuthnot, drily, "is to make their way to the mountains or the sea as soon as possible. Most of them do."

Tredennis's reply was characteristically abrupt:

"Mrs. Amory does not," he said.

"No," answered Arbuthnot, and he looked at the end of his cigar as if he saw nothing else.

"Why doesn't she?" demanded Tredennis.

"She ought to," said Arbuthnot, with calm adroitness.

"Ought to!" Tredennis repeated. "She should have gone months ago. She—she is actually ill. Why in heaven's name does she stay? She told me two weeks since that she was going to Fortress Monroe, or some such place."

"She had better go to a New England farm-house, and wear a muslin gown and swing in a hammock," said Arbuthnot.

"You see that as well, do you?" said the Colonel. "Why don't you tell her so?" and having said it, seemed to pull himself up suddenly, as if he felt he had been unconsciously impetuous.

Arbuthnot laughed.

His smile had died completely away, however, when he gave his side glance at his companion's face a moment later.

"She was quite serious in her intention of going away two weeks ago," he said. "She told me so; nothing but Richard's dinner-party prevented her departure in the first place."

He spoke in an entirely non-committal tone, but there was a touch of interest in his quiet glance at Tredennis.

"You dined there with Planefield and the rest, didn't you?" he added.

"Yes."

"I didn't. Richard was kind enough to invite me, but I should only have been in the way." He paused an instant, and then added, without any change of tone or manner, "I know nothing of the Westoria lands."

"Was it necessary that you should?" said Tredennis. "I did not."

"Oh," Arbuthnot answered, "I knew they would discuss them, and the bill, as it pleases Amory to be interested in them just now."

"I remember that the matter was referred to several times," said Tredennis; "even Mrs. Amory seemed to know a good deal of it."

"A good deal!" said Arbuthnot. "In favour of the bill?"

"Yes," Tredennis answered. "She had been reading up, it appeared. She said some very good things about it—in a laughing way. Why does she waste her time and strength on such folly?" he added, hotly. "Why—why is she allowed to do it?"

"The New England farm would be better for her just now," said Arbuthnot—again adroitly.

"Why should Amory waste his time upon it?" the Colonel went on,—"though that is his affair, of course, and not mine!"

They had reached the gate by this time, but they did not pass through it. Finding themselves near it, they turned—as if by mutual consent, and yet without speaking of doing so—into the walk nearest them.

It was after taking a few steps in silence down this path, that Colonel Tredennis spoke again, abruptly:

"When I was thinking of you just before we met," he said, "I was thinking of you in connection with—with the Amorys."

He knew the statement had a blunt enough sound, and his recognition of it irritated him, but he was beginning to be accustomed to his own bluntness of statement, and, at

any rate, this led him to the point he meant to reach.

Arbuthnot's reply was characteristic. It was not blunt at all, and had an air of simple directness, which was the result not only of a most creditable tact and far-sightedness, but of more private good feeling and sincerity than he was usually credited with.

"I am always glad to be thought of in connection with the Amorys," he said. "And I am glad that it is perfectly natural that I should be connected with them in the minds of their friends. There has been a very close connection between us for several years, and I hope they have found as much pleasure in it as I have."

Tredennis recognised the tact even if he was not aware of the good feeling and far-sightedness. The obstacles had been removed from his path, and the conversation had received an air of unconstrained naturalness, which would make it easier for him to go on.

"Then," he said, "there will be no need to explain what I mean by saying that I was thinking specially of your interest in Mrs. Amory herself—and your influence over her."

"I wish my influence over her was as strong as my interest in her," was his companion's reply. "My interest in her is a sincere enough feeling—and a deep one. There is every reason why it should be."

"I—" began the Colonel, "I ——" And then he stopped.

"Your interest in her," Arbuthnot went on, seeming to enjoy his cigar very much, "is even a more natural feeling than mine—though I scarcely think it can be stronger. It is not a matter of relationship so much,—as a rule, relationship does not amount to a great deal,—but the fact that you knew her as a girl, and feel towards the Professor as you do, must give her a distinct place in your mind."

"It is a feeling," said Tredennis, "which disturbs me when I see that she is in actual danger through her own want of care for herself. Are women always so reckless? Is it a Washington fashion? Why should she forget that her children need her care, if she does not choose to think of herself? Is that a Washington fashion, too?"

"You were thinking," said Arbuthnot, "and flattering me in doing it, that what I

might say to her on the necessity of leaving the city might have some little effect?"

"Yes," Tredennis answered. "And if not upon herself, upon Amory. He is always ready to listen to you."

Arbuthnot was silent for some moments. He was following a certain train of thought closely and rapidly, but his expression did not betray him at all.

"She would have gone two weeks ago," he said quietly next, "if it had not been for Richard's engagements with Planefield and the rest. He has had them at his house two or three times since then, and they have made little parties to Mount Vernon and Arlington and Great Falls. Planefield is a lady's man, and he finds Mrs. Amory very charming."

"What!" exclaimed Tredennis, with intolerant haughtiness,—"that coarse fellow?"

"He isn't a nice fellow," said Arbuthnot, "but he won't show his worst side to her—any more than he can help. He is a very powerful fellow, they say."

Here he stopped. They had reached their gateway again.

"I'll do what I can," he said. "It won't be much, perhaps—but I will do what I can.

I fully appreciate the confidence you showed in speaking to me."

"I fully appreciate the manner in which you listened to what I had to say," said Tredennis.

And, somewhat to Arbuthnot's surprise, he held out his hand to him.

CHAPTER XII.

FRIENDSHIP.

INSTEAD of making his way home at once, Arbuthnot turned up the side of the street on which the Amorys' house stood. As he reached the house, the door was opened, and a man came out and walked down the steps. He was a man with a large frame, a darkly florid complexion, and heavily handsome features. As he passed Arbuthnot he gave him a glance and a rather grudging bow, which expressed candidly exactly the amount of pleasure he derived from encountering him.

Bertha was in the parlour alone. When Arbuthnot entered he found her standing in the middle of the room, looking down at the roses on her gaily painted fan, and evidently not seeing them.

"Well," he began, by way of greeting, "I hope you have been enjoying yourself—with your senators."

She looked up, and made a quick, eager little movement towards him—as if she was more glad to see him than usual.

"Ah!" she exclaimed. "I believe I was wishing you would come."

"Thank you," he said, "but the compliment would be greater if you were sure of it."

"I think I am sure of it, now you are here," she answered, "though I don't know at all why I wanted you—unless it was to tell you that I have not been enjoying myself in the least—with my senators."

"I am delighted to hear it," he replied. "Nothing could please me better. They are always too numerous, and lately one is continually meeting them on the steps and being scowled at."

She shut her fan quickly, with a slight frown.

"Why scowled at?" she said. "That would be absurd enough."

"Absurd or not," he laughed, "it is true."

But notwithstanding his laugh, there was no change in her face he did not see.

They had seated themselves by this time, and Bertha was looking at her fan again, and opening and shutting it slowly.

"They are not my senators," she said. "They are Richard's, and—I am getting a little tired of them, though I should not like to tell him so. When it is warm, as it is to-day, I am very tired of them."

"I should not think it at all improbable," remarked Arbuthnot, dryly. "It has struck me that it would be necessary for the mercury to be several degrees below zero before you would find the one who went out just now, for instance, especially exhilarating."

"He is not exhilarating at all," she said. "Richard likes him," she added, a moment afterwards. "I don't know exactly why, but he really seems to admire him. They are quite intimate. I think the acquaintance began through some law business he gave him in connection with the Westoria lands. I have tried to like him on Richard's account. You must remember," she said, with a smile, "I first tried to like you on Richard's account."

"I hope you succeeded better than you will with Planefield," he said.

"I might succeed with him if I persevered long enough," she answered. "The difficulty lies in the perseverance. Richard says I would make a good lobbyist, but I am sure I should not. I could not be persistently amiable and entertaining to people who tired me."

"Don't deplore your deficiencies until it becomes necessary for you to enter the profession," said Arbuthnot. "I don't like to hear you speak of it," he added, with a touch of sharpness.

"I don't deplore them," said Bertha. "And it is only one of my little jokes. But if the fortunes of the Westoria lands depended on me, I am afraid they would be a dismal failure."

"As they don't depend on you," he remarked, "doesn't it occur to you that you might as well leave them to Senator Planefield? I must confess it has presented itself to me in that light."

"It is rather odd," she said, in a tone of reflection, "that though I have nothing whatever to do with them, they actually seem to have detained me in town for the last two weeks."

"It is quite time you went away," said Arbuthnot.

"I know that," she answered. "And I feel it more every day."

She raised her eyes suddenly to his.

"Laurence," she said, "I am not well. Don't tell Richard, but I think I am not well at all. I—I am restless and nervous—and—and morbid. I am actually morbid. Things trouble me which never troubled me before. Sometimes I lose all respect for myself. You know I always was rather proud of my self-control. I am not quite as proud of it as I used to be. About two weeks ago I—I positively lost my temper."

He did not laugh, as she had been half-afraid he would. His manner was rather quiet, on the contrary—it was as if what she said struck him as being worth listening to with some degree of serious attention, though his reply was not exactly serious.

"I hope you had sufficient reason," he said.

"No," she answered. "I had no reason at all, which makes it all the more humiliating. I think I have been rather irritable for a month or two. I have allowed myself to—

to be disturbed by things which were really of no consequence, and I have taken offence at things and—and—resented trifles, and it was the merest trifle which made me lose my temper—yes, actually lose my temper, and say what I did not intend to say, in the most open and abject manner. What could be more abject than to say things you did not intend to say? You know I never was given to that kind of thing."

"No," he responded, "it cannot be said that you were."

"It was so—so revolting to me after it was over," she went on, "that it seemed to make me more weak-minded than ever. When you once give way to your emotions, it is all going down-hill—you do it again and again. I never did it before, but I have been on the verge of doing it two or three times since."

"Don't go any farther than the verge," he said.

"I don't intend to," she answered. "I don't like even the verge. I resent it with all my strength. I should like to invent some kind of horrible torture to pay myself for—for what I did."

He was watching her very closely, but she

was not aware of it. She had arrested his attention completely enough by this time, and the fact made itself evident in his intent and rather startled expression.

"I hope it was nothing very serious," he said.

"It was serious enough for me," she replied. "Nobody else was hurt, but it was serious enough for me—the mere knowing that for a few minutes I had lost my hold on myself. I didn't like it—I didn't like it!"

There was an intensity in her manner, in her voice, in her face, in her very figure itself, which was curiously disproportionate to her words. She leaned forward a little, and laid her small, clenched hand upon her knee.

"In all my life," she said slowly, "in all my life, I have never had a feeling which was as strong as myself. I have been that fortunate. I have been angry, but never so angry that I could not seem perfectly still and calm; I have been happy, but never so happy that I could not have hidden it if I chose; I have been unhappy—for a moment or so—but never so unhappy that I had the horrible anguish of being found

out. I am not capable of strong, real emotions. I am too shallow and—and light. I have been light all my life, and I *will* be light until the end.

"Only the children could make me suffer, really," she said after it,—"only the children, and all women are like that. Through Janey, or Jack, or Meg, my heart could be torn in two, if they were in pain, or badly treated, or taken from me—that is nothing but common nature; but nothing else could hurt me so that I should cry out—nothing and nobody—not even Richard!"

She stopped herself, and opened her fan again.

"There!" she exclaimed. "Why did I say so much then, and say it so vehemently, as if it was of consequence? Nothing is of consequence—nothing, nothing!" And she laughed, and rose and began to take up and set down again some trifles on the mantel.

Arbuthnot still watched her.

"No," he said, "you are quite right—nothing is of consequence really, and the sooner one learns that, the better for one's peace of mind. The worst pain you could have to bear could not last you more than a

few score years, and you would get used to it in that time; the greatest happiness you could yearn for would not last any longer, and you would get tired of it in time, too."

"Tired of it!" she echoed. "One could tire of anything in three-score years and ten. How tired one must be of oneself before it is over—how tired! how tired!" and she threw up her hands in a sudden, desperate gesture.

"No," he answered, in a tone whose level coolness was a forcible contrast to her own. "Not necessarily, if one doesn't expect too much. If we take things for what they are worth, and don't let ourselves be deceived by them, there is plenty of rational entertainment to be had by the way. We mayn't like it quite as well as what we set out with expecting, but we can manage to subsist upon it. I hope I am logical. I know I am not eloquent." He said it bitterly.

"No," she returned, without looking at him, "you are not eloquent, perhaps, but you are speaking the truth—and I like to hear it. I want to hear it. It is good for me. It is always good for people to hear the truth—the bare, unvarnished, unadorned truth. Go on."

"If I go on," he said, still bitterly, "I shall begin to drag myself in, and I don't care to do it. It is natural that I should feel the temptation. I never knew the man yet who could talk in this strain and not drag himself in."

"Drag yourself in as much as you like," she said, even fiercely, "and be an example to me."

"I should be example enough if I said all I could," he replied. "Am *I* a happy man?"

She turned, and for a moment they looked into each other's eyes—his were stern, hard, and miserable.

"No," she cried out, "you are not. No one is happy in the world!" And she dropped her face upon her hands as she leaned upon the mantel.

"I might have been happier if I had begun right, I suppose," he said.

"Begun!" she repeated. "Does any one ever begin right? One ought to begin at the end and go backward, and then one might make something of it all."

"I didn't make much of it," he said. "I was not as wise as you. I began with emotions and follies and fires—and the rest of it, and the enjoyment I derived from them was

scarcely what I anticipated it would be. The emotions didn't last, and the follies didn't pay, and the fires burned out—and that was the worst of all. And they always do—and that is worse still. It is in the nature of things. Look at that grate," pointing to it. "It looked different a week ago, when we had a rainy night and sat around it. We could have burned ourselves at it then if we had been feeble-minded enough to try it—we couldn't do it now; and yet a few days ago it was hot enough. The fire has burned out, and even the ashes are gone."

She stooped down, picked up her fan, and reseated herself upon the sofa. She did not look quite like herself,—her face was very pale but for the two red spots Tredennis had seen on her cheeks when her display of feeling had startled him,—but all at once a change had taken place in her manner. There was a sort of deadly stillness in it.

"We are a long way from my temper," she said,—"a long way."

"Yes," he replied, "about as far as we could get in the space of time allowed us—and we have been a trifle emotional."

"And it was my fault," she continued.

"Isn't it time I went somewhere cool and bracing? I think you must admit it is."

"Yes," he said, "it is time. Take my advice, and go."

"I'll go," she said, steadily, "the day after to-morrow. And I'll not go to Fortress Monroe. I'll go into the mountains of Virginia—to a farm-house I know of, where one has forests and silence, and nature—and nothing else. I'll take the children, and live out-of-doors with them, and read to them, and talk to them, and sew for them when I want anything to do. I always was happy and natural when I was sewing and doing things for them. I like it. Living in that simple, natural way, and having the children with me, will rest and cure me if anything will on earth—the children always—the children——"

She stopped and sat perfectly still; her voice had broken, and she had turned her face a little away.

Arbuthnot got up. He stood a moment, as he always did before going, but he did not look direct at her, though he did not seem to avoid her in his glance.

"It is the best thing you can do," he said,—"the very best thing. You will be

thoroughly rested when you come home, and that is what you need. I will go now—I hear Richard, and I want to speak to him alone."

And by the time the door opened and Richard stood on the threshold, he had reached him and turned him around, throwing his arm boyishly over his shoulder.

"You are just in time," he said. "Take me into the museum, or the library. I want to have a confidential chat with you."

And they went out together.

CHAPTER XIII.

THE FAREWELL DINNER.

THE following day Richard presented himself to Tredennis in the morning, looking a little disturbed and scarcely in such excellent spirits as usual.

"Bertha and the children are going away to-morrow," he said. "And if you have no other engagement, you are to come and dine with us this evening and say good-bye."

"I have no other engagement," Tredennis answered. "I shall be glad to come. They are really going to Fortress Monroe to-morrow?"

Richard threw himself into a chair with a rather discontented air.

"They are not going to Fortress Monroe at all," he said. "They are going to bury themselves in the mountains of Virginia. It is a

queer fancy of Bertha's. I think she is making a mistake. She won't like it, really, when she tries it."

"If she needs rest," said Tredennis, "certainly the mountains of Virginia——"

"The mountains of Virginia," interrupted Richard, "were not made for Bertha. She will tire of them in a week. I wish she would not go!" he said, with the faintest possible touch of petulance.

"You will miss her very much, of course," said Tredennis.

"Oh yes, I shall miss her. I always miss her—and I shall miss her specially just now."

"Just now?" said Tredennis.

"Oh," said Richard, straightening himself somewhat and clearing his slightly knitted brow, "I was only thinking of two or three plans which had half-formed themselves in my mind. I was looking at it from a selfish point of view, which I had no right to do. I suppose things might wait—until she comes back."

"Are you going with her?" said Tredennis.

"I!" exclaimed Richard. "No, I could not do that. My business would not allow of it. I have more than usual on hand just now. I shall run down to see them once a week, if

possible. I must confess," with a laugh, "that I could not make up my mind to three months of it. Bertha knows that."

Taking all things into consideration, he bore the prospect of his approaching loneliness very well. He soon began to speak of other matters, and before he took his departure had quite recovered his usual gaiety. As he talked, Tredennis regarded him with some curiosity.

"He has a fortunate temperament," he was thinking. "He would have been happy if she had remained, but he is not unhappy because she goes. There are men who would take it less lightly—though, after all, he is the one to be envied."

Tredennis did not feel that he himself was greatly to be envied. He had said that she ought to go, and had been anxious and unhappy because she had not gone, but now that she was going he was scarcely happier. There were things he should miss every day. As he remembered them, he knew he had not allowed himself to admit what their value had been to him. The very fact that they had not been better friends made it harder. From the first he had been aware that a barrier stood between them, and in the interview which had revealed

to him something of its nature, he had received some sharp wounds.

"There was truth in what she said," he had often pondered since, "though she put it in a woman's way. I have resented what she has said and done, often enough, and have contrasted it bitterly with what I remembered—God knows why! I had no right to do it, and it was all folly, but I did it and made myself wretched through it—and she saw the folly and not the wretchedness."

But now that her presence would no longer colour and animate the familiar rooms, he realised what their emptiness would be. He could not endure the thought of what it would be to go into them for the first time and sit alone with Richard—no bright figure moving before them, or sitting in its chair by the table, or the window, or the hearth. The absence of the very things which had angered and disturbed him would leave a blank. It would actually be a wretchedness to see no longer that she often chose to be flippant, and mocked for mere mocking's sake.

"What!" he said, savagely. "Am I beginning to care for her very faults? Then it is best that she should go."

But his savageness was not against Bertha, but against himself and his weakness.

When he arrived at the house in the evening, he found Bertha in the parlour with Jack and Janey, who were to be allowed to share the farewell dinner.

As she advanced to meet him with a child on either side, he was struck by certain changes which he observed in her dress and manner. She wore a dark, simple gown, her hair was dressed a trifle more closely and plainly than usual, and there was no colour about her. When she gave him her hand, and stood with the other resting on Jack's shoulder, her eyes uplifted to his own, he was bewildered by a feeling that he was suddenly brought face to face with a creature quite strange to him. He could not have said that she was actually cold and reserved, but there was that in the quiet of her manner which suggested both reserve and coldness.

"I have allowed the children to stay down stairs," she said, "and they are to dine with us if they will be good. They wished very much to see as much of you as possible—as it will be some time before they return—and I think they will be quiet."

"If you will seat one on each side of me," said Tredennis, "I will keep them quiet."

"You are very kind," she answered, "but I should scarcely like to do that."

And then she returned to her seat by the window, and he sat opposite her on the end of a sofa, with Janey leaning against his knee.

"You are not going to Fortress Monroe?" he said.

"No," she replied. "I am going to the Virginia mountains."

"I should think that would be better," he said, putting an arm around Janey.

"I thought so," she answered, "upon reflection. I am not as strong as I should be, and I think I dislike ill-health even more than most people do."

She held Jack's hand, and spoke in a quiet tone of common things—of her plans for the summer, of the children, of Richard; and Tredennis listened like a man in a dream, missing the colour and vivacity from her manner as he had known he should miss her presence from the rooms when she was gone.

"Tell Uncle Philip something of what we are going to do," she said to Jack. "Tell him about the hammocks, and the spades we are

to dig with, and the books. We are to live out of doors and enjoy ourselves immensely," she added, with a faint smile.

"Mamma is going to play with us every day," said Jack, triumphantly. "And we are going to lie in our hammocks while she reads to us and tells us stories."

"And there will be no parties and no company," added Janey. "Only we are to be the company."

"And Jack is to take care of me," said Bertha, "because I am growing old and he is so big."

Jack regarded her dubiously.

"You haven't any wrinkles," he said.

"Yes I have, Jack," she answered, "but they don't show." And a little laugh broke from her, and she let her cheek rest against his dark love-locks for a moment in a light caress.

Glancing up at the colonel's face at this juncture, Janey found cause in it for serious dissatisfaction. She raised her hand, and drew a small forefinger across his forehead.

"Uncle Philip," she said, "you are bad again. The black marks have come back, and you are quite ugly—and you promised

you would try not to let them come any more."

"I beg your pardon, Janey," he answered, and then turned to Bertha. "She does not like my black face," he said, "and no wonder. I am rather an unfortunate fellow, to have my faults branded upon me so plainly that even a child can see them."

There was a touch of bitterness in the words and in his manner of uttering them. Bertha answered him in a soft, level voice.

"You are severe upon yourself," she said. "It is much safer to be severe upon other people."

It was rather cruel, but she did not object to being cruel. There come to most women moments when to be cruel is their only refuge against themselves and others, and such a moment had come to her.

In looking back upon the evening when it was over, the feeling that it had been unreal was stronger in Tredennis's mind than any other. It was all unreal from beginning to end—the half-hour before dinner, when Arbuthnot and Richard and the professor came in, and Bertha stood near her father's chair and talked to him, and Tredennis, holding

Jȧney on his knee and trying to answer her remarks lucidly, was aware only of the presence of the dark, slender figure near him, and the strange quiet of the low voice ; the dinner itself, during which Richard was in the most attractive mood and the professor was rather silent, and Arbuthnot's vivacity was a little fitful at first and afterwards seemed to recover itself and rise to the occasion, while Bertha, with Jack on one hand and Janey on the other, cared for their wants and answered Richard's sallies and aided him in them, and yet was not herself at all, but a new being.

"And you think," said the professor, later in the evening, when they had returned to the parlours,—"you think that you will like the quiet of the mountains?"

"I think it will be good for me," she answered, "and the children will like it."

"She will not like it at all," said Richard. "She will abhor it in ten days, and she will rush off to Fortress Monroe and dance every night to make up for her temporary mental abberration."

"No, she will not," said Arbuthnot. "She has made preparations to enjoy her seclusion in its dramatic aspects. She is going to retire

from the world in the character of a graceful anchorite, and she has already begun to dress the part. She is going to be simple and serious and a trifle severe—and it even now expresses itself in the lines and colour of her gown."

She turned towards him, with the sudden gleam of some new expression in her eyes.

"How well you understand me!" she said. "No one else would have understood me so well. I never can deceive you, at least. Yes, you are quite right. I am going to enjoy the thing dramatically. I don't want to go, but as I feel it discreet I intend to amuse myself, and make the best of it. I am going to play at being maternal and amiable, and even domesticated. I have a costume for it, as I have one for bathing and dining and making calls. This," she said, touching her dress, "is part of it. Up stairs I have a little mob-cap and an apron, and a work-basket to carry on my arm. They are not unbecoming, either. Shall I run up into the nursery and put them on, and show them to you? Then you can be sure that I comprehend the part."

"Have you a mob-cap and an apron?" asked Richard. "Have you, really?"

"Yes, really," she answered. "Don't you remember that I told you that it was my dresses that were of consequence, and not myself? Shall I go and put them on?"

Her tone was soft no longer—it was a little hard, and so was the look which half hid itself behind the brightness of the eyes she turned towards him.

"Yes," he answered. "Put them on and let us see them."

She turned round and went out of the room, and Arbuthnot followed her with a rather anxious glance. The professor stirred his tea as usual, and Tredennis turned his attention to Janey, while Richard laughed.

"I have no doubt she has all three," he said. "And they will be well worth seeing."

They were worth seeing. In a few minutes she returned—the little work-basket on her arm, the mob-cap upon her head, the apron around her waist, and a plain square of white muslin crossed upon her bosom. She stopped in the door-way, and made a curtsey.

"There ought to be a curtain, and somebody ought to ring it up," she said. "Enter the domestic virtues."

And she came and stood before them, her

eyes shining still, and her head erect, but—perhaps through the rather severe black and white of her costume—seeming to have a shade less colour than before.

"I did not make them for this occasion," she said. "They have appeared before. You don't remember them, Richard, but I had them when Jack was a baby—and a novelty. I tried being maternal then."

"Why, yes," said Richard, "to be sure I remember them—and very becoming they were, too."

"Oh, yes," she answered. "I knew they were becoming!"

She turned and fronted Tredennis.

"I hope they are becoming, now," she said, and made her little curtsey again.

"They are very becoming," he answered, looking at her steadily. "I like them better than—the silks and brocades."

"Thank you," she said. "I thought you would—or I would not have put them on. Jack and Janey, come and stand on each side of me while I sit down. I have always congratulated myself that you were becoming. This is what we shall be constrained to do when we are in Virginia, only

we shall not have the incentive of being looked at."

"We will make up a party," said Richard, "and come down once a week to look at you. Planefield would enjoy it, I am sure."

"Thank you," said Bertha. "And I will always bring out the work-basket, with a lace collar for Meg in it. Lace collars are more becoming than small aprons or stocking-mending. Do you remember the little shirt Mrs. Rawdon Crawley was making for her boy, and which was always produced when she was in virtuous company? Poor Rawdon was quite a big boy, and very much too large for it, by the time it was finished. I wonder if Meg will be grown up before she gets her collar."

She produced a needle, threaded it, and took a few stitches, bending her head over her task with a serious air.

"Does it look as if I had done it before?" she said. "I hope it does. I really have, you know. Once I sewed on a button for Richard."

But she did not sew many minutes. Soon she laid her work down in the basket.

"There!" she said, "that is enough! I

have made my impression, and that is all I care for—or I *should* have made my impression if you had been strangers. If you had not known me, you would have had time to say to one another: 'What a simple, affectionate little creature she must be! After all, there is nothing which becomes a woman so well as to sit at her work in that quiet, natural way, with her children about her!' Come, Jack and Janey, it is time for you to say good-night, and let me make a pretty exit with you, in my mob-cap and apron."

She took them away, and remained up stairs with them until they were in bed. When she came back she did not bring the work-basket, but she had not taken off the cap and handkerchief. She held an open letter in her hand, and went to Richard and sat down by him. Her manner had changed again entirely. It was as if she had left up stairs something more than the work-basket.

"Richard," she said, "I did not tell you I had had a letter from Agnes Sylvestre."

"From Agnes Sylvestre!" he exclaimed. "Why, no, you didn't! But it is good news. Laurence, you must remember Agnes Sylvestre!"

"Perfectly," was the answer. "She was not the kind of person you forget."

"She was a beautiful creature," said Richard, "and I always regretted that we lost sight of her as we did after her marriage. Where is she now, Bertha?"

"When she wrote she was at Castellamare. She went abroad, you know, immediately after her husband's death."

"He was not the nicest fellow in the world, that Sylvestre," said Richard. "He was not the man for a woman like that to marry. I wonder if she did not find out that she had made a mistake?"

"If she did," said Bertha, "she bore it very well, and it has been all over for more than two years."

She turned suddenly to Tredennis.

"Did not you once tell me——" she began.

"Yes," he replied. "I met her in Chicago, and Mr. Sylvestre was with her."

"It must have been two or three weeks before his death," said Bertha. "He died quite suddenly, and they were in Chicago at the time. Do you remember how she looked and if you liked her?—but of course you liked her."

"I saw her only for a short time," he answered. "We talked principally of you. She was very handsome, and had a sweet voice, and large, calm eyes."

Bertha was silent a moment.

"Yes," she said next, "she has beautiful eyes. They are large and clear like a child's, but they are not childish eyes. She sees a great deal with them. I think there was never anything more effective than a way she has of looking at you quietly and directly for a few seconds, without saying anything at all."

"You wonder what she is thinking of," said Arbuthnot. "And you hope she is thinking of yourself and are inclined to believe she is, when there are ten chances to one that she is not at all."

"But she generally is," said Bertha. "The trouble is that perhaps she is not thinking exactly what you would like best, though she will never tell you so, and you would not discover it from her manner. She has an adorable manner—it is soft and well-bred, but she never wastes herself."

"I remember," said Tredennis, "that I thought her very attractive."

Bertha turned more directly towards him. "She is exactly what *you* would like," she said,—"exactly. When I said just now that her way of looking at people was effective, I used the worst possible word, and did her an injustice. She is never effective — in that way. To be effective it seems to me, you must apply yourself. Agnes Sylvestre never applies herself. Trifles do not amuse her as they amuse me. I entertain myself with my whims and with all sorts of people; she has no whims, and cares only for the people she is fond of. If she were here to-night, she would look calmly at my mop-cap and apron and wonder what I meant by them, and what mental process I had gone through to reach the point of finding it worth while to wear them."

"Oh," said Arbuthnot, "I should not think she was slow at following mental processes."

"No," answered Bertha, "I did not mean that. She would reason clearly enough, after she had looked at me a few moments and asked herself the question. But in talking of her, I am forgetting to tell you that she is coming home, and will spend next winter in Washington."

"Congratulate yourself, Laurence," said Richard. "We may all congratulate ourselves. It will be something more to live for."

"As to congratulating myself," said Arbuthnot, "I should have no objection to devoting the remainder of the evening to it, but I am afraid——"

"Of what?" demanded Bertha.

"Oh," he answered, "she will see through *me* with her calm eyes. And as you say, she never wastes herself."

"No," said Bertha, "she never wastes herself. And, after all, it is Colonel Tredennis who has most reason to congratulate himself. He has not thrown away his time. I am obliged to admit that she once said to me of you, 'Why does he throw away his time? Does he never think at all?' Yes, it is Colonel Tredennis who must be congratulated."

It was chiefly of Agnes Sylvestre they talked during the rest of the evening.

"She is a person who says very little of herself," was Bertha's comment, "but there is a great deal to say of her."

And so there seemed to be. There were anecdotes to be related of her, the charm of her beauty and manner was to be analysed,

and all of her attributes were found worth touching upon.

It was Tredennis who took his departure first. When he rose to go, Bertha, who was talking to Arbuthnot, did not at first observe his movement, and when he approached her she turned with an involuntary start.

"You—are going now?" she said.

"Yes," he answered. "I wish you a pleasant summer and all the rest you require."

She stood up and gave him her hand.

"Thank you," she replied. "I shall be sure to have the rest."

It scarcely seemed more than the ordinary conventional parting for the night; to Tredennis it seemed something less. There were only a few words more, and he dropped her hand and went out of the room.

He had certainly felt that this was the last, and only a powerful effort of will held in check a feeling whose strength he would have been loth to acknowledge.

"Such things are always a wrench," he said, mentally. "I never bore them well."

And he had barely said it when he heard Bertha cross the parlour quickly and pass

through the door. He had bent to take up a paper he had left on the hat-stand, and when he turned she was close to him.

Something in her look was so unusual that he recognised it with an inward start. Her eyes were a little dilated, and her breath came with soft quickness, as if she had moved rapidly and impulsively. She put out both her hands with a simple, sudden gesture, and with an action as simple and unpremeditated he took them and held them in his own.

"I came," she said, "to say good-bye again. All at once I seemed to—to realise that it would be months before I—we saw you again. And so many things happen, and ——" She stopped a second, but went on after it. "When I come back," she said, "I shall be well and strong, and like a new person. Say good-bye to this person," and a smile came and went as she said it.

"A moment ago," he answered, "I was telling myself that good-byes were hard upon me."

"They—they are not easy," she said.

This at least was not easy for him. Her

hands were trembling in his clasp. The thought came to him that perhaps some agitation she wished to hide had driven her from the room within, and she had come to him for momentary refuge because he was near. She looked up at him for a second with a touch of desperation in her eyes, and then he saw her get over it, and she spoke.

"Jack and Janey will miss you very much," she said. "You have been very kind to them. I think—it is your way to be good to every one."

"My opportunities of being good have been limited," he said. "If—if one should present itself," and he held her hands a little closer, "you won't let me miss my chance, will you? There is no reason for my saying so much, of course, but—but you will try to remember that I am here and always ready to come when I am called."

"Yes," she said, "I think you would come if I called you. And I thank you very much. And good-bye—good-bye."

And she drew her hands away and stood with them hanging clasped before her, as if

she meant to steady them, and so she stood until he was gone.

He was breathing quickly himself when he reached the street.

"Yes," he said, "the professor was right. It is Arbuthnot—it is Arbuthnot."

CHAPTER XIV.

RICHARD'S PLANS.

When he passed the house the next day, they were gone. The nursery windows were thrown open, and he fancied that the place wore a deserted look. The very street seemed empty, and the glare of sunshine whose heat increased with every hour added to the air of desolateness he imagined.

"It *is* imagination," he said. "And the feeling will die away all the more quickly because I recognise the unreality of it. By to-morrow or the day after, I shall have got over it."

And yet a week later, when he dropped in upon the professor, one sultry evening, to spend an hour with him, his old friend found cause for anxious inspection of him.

"What," he said, "the hot weather begins

to tell on you already! You are not acclimatised yet, that's it. You must spare yourself as much as possible. It doesn't promise well that you look fagged so soon. I should say you had not slept well."

"I don't sleep well," Tredennis answered.

"You are working too hard?" said the professor; "that is it, perhaps."

"I am not working hard enough," replied Tredennis, with a slight knitting of the brows. "I wish I had more to do. Leisure does not agree with me."

"One must occupy oneself!" said the professor. He spoke half-absently, and yet with a touch of significance in his tone which—combined with the fact that he had heard the words before—caused Tredennis to glance at him quickly.

He smiled slightly, in answer to the glance.

"Bertha?" he said. "Oh, yes, I am quoting Bertha. Your manner is not as light as hers, but it reminded me of her in some way—perhaps because I had a letter from her to-day, and she was in my thoughts."

"I hope she is well," said Tredennis, "and does not find her farm-house too dull."

"She does not complain of it," the pro-

fessor answered. "And she says nothing of her own health, but tells me she is a little anxious about Janey, who does not seem quite herself."

Tredennis looked out into the darkening street. They were sitting by the opened window.

"She was not well when she went away," he said, a trifle abstractedly.

"Janey?" asked the professor, as if the idea was new to him. "I did not know that."

Tredennis roused himself.

"I—was thinking of Bertha," he said.

"Oh, of Bertha," said the professor, and then he lapsed into a reverie himself for a few moments; and seemed to watch the trees on the street without seeing them.

"No, she was not well," he said, at length, "but I think she will be better when she comes back."

"The rest and quiet——" began Tredennis.

"I think she had determined to be better," said the professor.

"Determined?" repeated Tredennis.

"She has a strong will," returned the professor, "though it is a thing she is never

suspected of. She does not suspect herself of it, and yet she has relied upon its strength from the first, and is relying upon it now. I am convinced that she went away with the determination to conquer a restlessness whose significance she is just awakening to. And she deliberately chose nature and the society of her children as the best means of cure."

"Do you think," asked Tredennis, in a low voice, "that she will get over it?"

The professor turned to look at him.

"I don't know," he answered, with a slight tone of surprise. "Why did you fancy I would?"

"You seem to understand her——" said Tredennis.

The professor sighed.

"I have studied her so long," he replied, "that I imagine I know what she is *doing*, but you can't safely go beyond that with women—you can't say what they are *going* to do—with any degree of certainty. They are absorbingly interesting as a study, but they are not to be relied on. And they rarely compliment your intelligence by doing what you expect of them. *She* has not done what I expected. She has lived longer than I thought

she would without finding herself out. A year ago she believed that she had proved to herself that such an emotion as—as this was impossible to her. It was a very innocent belief, and she was entirely sincere in it and congratulated herself upon it." He turned to Tredennis again with a sudden movement and a curious look of pain in his face. "I am afraid it's a great mistake," he said.

"What?" Tredennis asked.

"This—this feeling," he said, in a tremulous and troubled voice. "I don't mean in her alone, but in any one, everywhere. I am not sure that it ever brings happiness really in the end. I am afraid there always *is* an end. If there wasn't, it might be different; but I am afraid there is. There are those of us who try to believe there is none, but—but I am afraid those are happiest who lose all but their ideal. There are many who lose even that, and Fate has done her worst by them." He checked himself, and sank back in his chair.

"Ah!" he said, smiling half sadly, "I am an old man—an old man—and it is an old man's fancy, that the best thing in life is death. And Fate did not do her worst by me; she left

me my ideal. She had grey eyes," he added, "and a bright face like Bertha's. Perhaps, after all, if I had won what I wanted, I should not feel so old to-night, and so tired. Her face was very bright."

He had not been wholly well for some days, and to-night seemed fatigued by the heat and languor in the air, but he was somewhat more hopeful when he spoke of Bertha than he had been.

"I have confidence in the strength of her will," he said, "and I like her pride and courage. She does not give way to her emotions; she resents them fiercely, and refuses to acknowledge their power over her. She insists to herself that her restlessness is nervousness, and her sadness morbid."

"She said as much to me," said Tredennis.

"Did she?" exclaimed the professor. "That is a good sign; it shows that she has confidence in you, and that it is a feeling strong enough to induce her to use you as a defence against her own weakness. She would never have spoken if she had not believed that you were a sort of stronghold. It is the old feeling of her girlhood ruling her again. Thank heaven for that!"

There was a ring at the front-door bell as he spoke, and a moment or so later it was answered by a servant; buoyant feet were heard in the hall, and paused a second on the threshold.

"Are you here, professor?" some one inquired. "And may I come in?"

Professor Herrick turned his head.

"Come in, Richard," he said; "come in, by all means." And Amory entered and advanced towards them.

The slight depression of manner Tredennis had fancied he had seen in him on the last two occasions of their meeting had disappeared altogether. He seemed even in gayer spirits than usual.

"I have come to tell you," he said to the professor, "that I am going away for a short time. It is a matter of business connected with the Westoria lands. I may be away a week or two."

"Isn't it rather a long journey?" asked the professor.

"Oh, yes," he replied, with no air of being daunted by the prospect—"and a tiresome one, but it is important that I should make it, and I shall not be alone."

"Who is to be your companion?"

"Planefield—and he's rather an entertaining fellow, in his way—Planefield. Oh, it won't be so bad, on the whole."

"It is Planefield who is interested in the lands, if I remember rightly," suggested the professor.

"Oh, Planefield?" Richard replied, carelessly. "Well, more or less. He is given to interesting himself in things, and, by Jove," he added, with a laugh, "this promises to be a good thing to be interested in. I shouldn't mind if I——"

"My dear Richard," interposed the professor, "allow me to advise you not to do so. You'll really find it best. Such things rarely end well."

Richard laughed again.

"My dear professor," he answered, with much good humour, "you may rely upon me. I haven't any money of my own."

"And if you had money?" said the professor.

"I think I should risk it. I really do. Though why I should say risk, I hardly know. There is scarcely enough risk to make it exciting."

He was very sanguine, and once or twice became quite brilliant on the subject. The great railroad, which was to give the lands an enormous value, was almost an established fact, everything was being laid in train: a man influenced here, a touch given there, a vigorous move made in this direction, an interest awakened in that, and the thing was done.

"There isn't a doubt of the termination," he said, "not a doubt. It's a brilliant sort of thing that is its own impetus, one might say, and the right men are at work for it, and the right wom——"

"Were you going to say women?" asked Tredennis, when he pulled himself up somewhat abruptly.

"Well, yes," Richard said blithely. "After all, why not? I must confess to finding the fact lend colour and vivacity to the thing. And the delightful cleverness the clever ones show, is a marvellous power for or against a thing, though I think the feminine tendency is to work for a thing, not against it."

"I should like to know," said Tredennis, "how they begin it."

For a moment he thought he did not know

why he asked the question; but the self-delusion did not last long. He felt an instant later that he did know, and wished that he did not.

"In nine cases out of ten," Richard replied, giving himself up at once to an enjoyable analysis of the subject,—"in nine cases out of ten, it is my impression they begin with almost entire lack of serious intention, and rarely, if ever, even in the end, admit to themselves that they have done what they are accused of. Given a clever and pretty woman, whose husband or other male relative needs her assistance; why should she be less clever and pretty in the society of one political dignitary than in that of another, whose admiration of her charms may not be of such importance? I suppose that is the beginning, and then come the sense of power and the fascination of excitement. What woman does not like both? What woman is better and more charming than Bertha, and Bertha does not hesitate to admit, in her own delightful way, that there must have been a fascination in the lives of those historical charmers before whom prime ministers trembled, and who could make and unmake a cabinet with a smile."

"What," was the thought which leaped into Tredennis's mind, "do we begin to compare Bertha with a king's favourite!" But he did not say it aloud—it was not for him to defend her against her husband's lightness, and were they not her own words, after all? And so he could only sit silent in the shadow of his darkening corner and knit his heavy brows with hot resentment in his heart, while Richard went on:

"There are some few who make a profession of it," he said, "but they do not carry the most power. The woman who is ambitious for her husband, or eager for her son, or who wishes to escape from herself and find refuge in some absorbing excitement, necessarily is more powerful than the more sordid element. If I were going in for that sort of thing," he went on, settling himself in his favourite graceful, lounging posture, and throwing his arm lightly behind his head—"if I were going in for it, and might make a deliberate choice, I think I should choose a woman who had something to forget—a woman who had reached an emotional crisis—who was young and yet who could not take refuge in girlish forgetfulness, and who, in spite of her youth,

had lived beyond trusting in the future—a woman who represented beauty, and wit, and despair—(the despair would be the strongest lever of all). There isn't a doubt of it that such a woman, taken at such a turning-point in her existence, could move—the world, if you like—the world itself," and he arranged himself a trifle more comfortably, and half laughed again.

"But," suggested the professor, "you are not going in for that sort of thing, my dear Richard?"

"Oh, no, no," answered Richard, "but *if* I were, I must confess it would have a fascination for me which would not permit of my regarding it in cold blood. I am like Bertha, you know—I like my little drama."

"And, speaking of Bertha," said the professor, "if anything should happen while you are away——"

"Now, really," said Richard, "that shows what a careless fellow I am! Do you know it never once occurred to me that anything could happen. We have such an admirable record to look back upon, Bertha and I, though I think I usually refer the fact to

Bertha's tact and executive ability—nothing ever has happened, and I feel that we have established a precedent. But if anything should happen, you had better telegraph to Merritsville. In any ordinary event, however, I feel quite safe in leaving Bertha in your hands and Tredennis's," he said, smiling at the large shadow in the corner. "One is always sure, in the midst of the ruling frivolity, that Tredennis is to be relied on."

He went away soon after, and Tredennis, bidding the professor good-night, left the house with him.

As they passed down the steps, Richard put his arm through his companion's with caressing friendliness.

"It wouldn't do you any harm to take a run up into Virginia yourself, once in a while," he said. "You have been losing ground since the heat set in, and we can't submit to that. We need your muscular development in its highest form, as an example to our modern deterioration. Kill two birds with one stone when you have a day's leisure—go and see Bertha and the children, and lay in a new supply of that delightful robustness we envy and admire."

"I should be glad to see Bertha," said Tredennis.

"She would be glad to see you," Richard answered. "And while I am away, it will be a relief to me to feel that she has you to call upon in case of need. The professor —dear old fellow—is not as strong as he was. And you — as I said before — one naturally takes the liberty of relying on your silent substantiality."

"Thank you," said Tredennis. "If it is a matter of avoirdupois——"

Richard turned quickly to look at him.

"Ah, no," he said. "Not that—though being human, we respect the avoirdupois. It's something else, you know. Upon my word, I can't exactly say what, but something which makes a man feel instinctively that he can shift his responsibilities upon you and they will be in good hands. Perhaps it is not an enviable quality in oneself, after all. Here am I, you see, shifting Bertha and the children off on your shoulders."

"If I can be of any use to Bertha and the children, why not?" said Tredennis, tersely.

"Oh, but one might also say 'Why?'" returned Richard. "We haven't any claim

on you, really, and yet we do it, or, rather, I do it, which speaks all the more strongly for your generosity and trustworthiness."

"And you will be away——?" Tredennis began.

"Two or three weeks. It might be more, but I think not. We separate here, I think, as I am going to drop in on Planefield. Good-night, and thanks."

"Good-night," responded Tredennis, and they shook hands and parted.

CHAPTER XV.

THE PROFESSOR'S VISITORS.

DURING the hot days and nights of the next few weeks, Tredennis found life rather a dreary affair. Gradually the familiar faces he met on the avenue became fewer and fewer, the houses he knew one after another assumed their air of summer desertion, offering as their only evidences of life an occasional coloured servant sunning him or herself on the steps; the crowds of nursery-maids with their charges thinned out in the parks, and the freshness of the leaves was lost under a coating of dust, while the countenances of those for whom there was no prospect of relief expressed either a languid sense of injury or the patience of despair.

"But after all," Tredennis said, on two or three occasions, as he sat in one of the parks

in the evening,—"after all, I suppose most of them have—an object," adding the last two words with a faint smile.

He was obliged to confess to himself that of late he found that the work which he had regarded as his object had ceased to satisfy him. He gave his attention to it with stern persistence, and refused to spare himself when he found his attention wandering; he even undertook additional labour, writing in his moments of leisure several notable articles upon various important questions of the day, and yet he had time left to hang heavy on his hands and fill him with weariness; and at last there came an evening when, after sitting in one of the parks until the lamps were lighted, he rose suddenly from his seat, and spoke as if to the silence and shadow about him.

"Why should I try to hide the truth from myself?" he said. "It is too late for that. I may as well face it like a man, and bear it like one. Many a brave fellow has carried a bullet in his body down to his grave, and seldom winced. This is something like that, I suppose, only that pain——" And he drew a sharp, hard breath, and walked away

down the deserted path without ending the sentence.

He made many a struggle after this to resist one poor temptation which beset him daily — the temptation to pass through the street in which stood the familiar house, with its drawn blinds and closed doors. Sometimes, when he rose in the morning, he was so filled with an unreasoning yearning for a sight of its blankness that he was overwhelmed by it, and went out before he breakfasted.

"It is weakness and self-indulgence," he would say, "but it is a very little thing, and it can hurt no one—it is only a little thing, after all." And he found a piteous pleasure—at which at first he tried to smile, but at which before long he ceased even to try to smile—in the slow walk down the street, on which he could see this window or that, and remember some day when he had caught a glimpse of Bertha through it, or some night he had spent in the room within when she had been gayer than usual, or quieter—when she had given him some new wound, perhaps, or when she had half-healed an old one in some mood of relenting he had not understood.

"There is no reason why I should understand any woman," was his simple thought. "And why should I understand her unless she chose to let me? She is like no other woman."

He was quite sure of this. In his thoughts of her he found every word and act of hers worth remembering and even repeating mentally again and again for the sake of the magnetic grace which belonged only to herself, and it never once occurred to him that his own deep sympathy and tender fancy might brighten all she did.

"When she speaks," he thought, "how the dullest of them stir and listen! When she moves across a room, how natural it is to turn and look at her, and be interested in what she is going to do! What life I have seen her put in some poor, awkward wretch by only seating herself near him and speaking to him of some common thing! One does not know what her gift is, and whether it is well for her or ill that it was given her, but one sees it in the simplest thing she does."

It was hard to avoid giving himself up to such thoughts as these, and when he most needed refuge from them he always sought

it in the society of the professor; so there were few evenings when he did not spend an hour or so with him, and their friendship grew and waxed strong until there could scarcely have been a closer bond between them.

About two weeks after Richard Amory's departure, making his call later than usual one evening, he met, coming down the steps, Mr. Arbuthnot, who stopped, with his usual civility, to shake hands with him.

"It is some weeks since we have crossed each other's paths, Colonel," he said, scrutinising him rather closely. "And, in the meantime, I am afraid you have not been well."

"Amory called my attention to the fact a short time ago," responded Tredennis, "and so did the professor. So, perhaps, there is some truth in it. I hadn't noticed it myself."

"You will presently, I assure you," said Arbuthnot, still regarding him with an air of interest. "Perhaps Washington doesn't agree with you. I have heard of people who couldn't stand it. They usually called it malaria, but I think there was generally something——" He checked himself some-

what abruptly, which was a rather unusual demonstration on his part, as it was his habit to weigh his speech with laudable care and deliberation. "You are going to see the professor?" he inquired.

"Yes," answered Tredennis.

The idea was presenting itself to his mind that there was a suggestion of something unusual in the questioner's manner—that it was not so entirely serene as was customary, that there was even a hint of some inward excitement strong enough to be repressed only by an effort. And the consciousness of this impressed itself upon him even while a flow of light talk went on, and Arbuthnot smiled at him from his upper step.

"I have been to see the professor, too," he was saying, "and I felt it was something of an audacity. His invitations to me have always been of the most general nature, but I thought I would take the liberty of pretending that I fancied he regarded them seriously. He was very good to me, and exhibited wonderful presence of mind in not revealing that he was surprised to see me. I tried not to stay long enough to tire him, and he was sufficiently amiable to ask me to

come again. He evidently appreciated the desolation of my circumstances."

"You are finding it dull?" said Tredennis.

"Dull!" repeated Arbuthnot. "Yes, I think you might call it dull. The people who kindly condescend to notice me in the winter have gone away, and my dress-coat is packed in camphor. I have ceased to be useful, and even if Fate had permitted me to be ornamental, where should I air my charms? There seems really no reason why I should exist, until next winter, when I may be useful again, and receive, in return, my modicum of entertainment. To be merely a superior young man in a Department is not remunerative in summer, as one ceases to glean the results of one's superiority. At present I might as well be inferior, and neither dance, nor talk, nor sing, and be utterly incapacitated by nature for either carrying wraps or picking up handkerchiefs —and you cannot disport yourself at the watering-places of the rich and great on a salary of a hundred dollars a month, and you could only get your sordid 'month's leave,' if such a thing were possible."

"I—have been dull myself," said Tredennis, hesitantly.

"If it should ever occur to you to drop in and see a fellow-sufferer," said Arbuthnot, "it would relieve the monotony of *my* lot, at least, and might awaken in me some generous emotions."

Tredennis looked up at him.

"It never has occurred to you so far, I see," was Arbuthnot's light reply to the look, "but if it should, don't resist the impulse. I can assure you it is a laudable one. And my humble apartment has the advantage of comparative coolness."

When Tredennis entered the library, he found the professor sitting in his usual summer seat near the window. A newspaper lay open on his knee, but he was not reading it—he seemed, indeed, to have fallen into a reverie of a rather puzzling kind.

"Did you meet any one as you came in?" he asked of Tredennis, as soon as they had exchanged greetings.

"I met Mr. Arbuthnot," Tredennis answered, "and stopped a few moments on the steps to talk to him."

"He has been entertaining me for the

last hour," said the professor, taking off his glasses and beginning to polish them. "Now, will you tell me," he asked, with his quiet air of reflective inquiry into an interesting subject,—"will you tell me why he comes to entertain *me?*"

"He gave me the impression," answered Tredennis, "that his object in coming was that you might entertain him, and he added that you were very good to him, and he appeared to have enjoyed his call very much."

"That is his way," responded the professor, impartially. "And a most agreeable way it is. To be born with such a way as a natural heritage is to be a social millionaire. And the worst of it is, that it may be a gift entirely apart from all morals and substantial virtues. Bertha has it. I don't know where she got it. Not from me, and not from her poor mother. I say it *may be* apart from all morals and substantial virtues. I don't say it always is. I haven't at all made up my mind what attributes go along with it in Arbuthnot's case. I should like to decide. But it would be an agreeable way in a criminal of the deepest dye. It is certainly agreeable that

he should in some subtle manner be able to place me in the picturesque attitude of a dignified and entertaining host. I didn't entertain him at all," he added, simply. "I sat and listened to him."

"He is frequently well worth listening to," commented Tredennis.

"He was well worth listening to this evening," said the professor. "And yet he was light enough. He had two or three English periodicals under his arm, one of them was *Punch*, and—and I found myself laughing quite heartily over it. And then there was something about a new comic opera, and he seemed to know the libretto by heart, and ran over an air or so on the piano. And he had been reading a new book and was rather clever about it—in his way, of course, but still it was cleverness. And then he went to the piano again and sang a captivating little love-song very well, and after it, got up and said good-night—and on the whole I regretted it. I liked his pictures, I liked his opera, I liked his talk of the book, and I liked his little love-song. And how should he know that an old dry-bones would like a tender little ballad and be touched by

it, and pleased because his sentiment was discovered and pandered to. Oh, it is the old story. It's his way—it's the way."

"I am beginning to think," said Tredennis, slowly, "that 'his way' might be called sympathy and good feeling and fine tact, if one wanted to be specially fair to him."

The professor looked up rather quickly.

"I thought you did not like him," he said.

Tredennis paused a moment, looking down at the carpet as if deliberating.

"I don't think I do," he said at length, "but it's no fault of his—the fault lies in me. I haven't the way, and I am at a disadvantage with him. He is never at a loss, and I am; he is ready-witted and self-possessed, I am slow and rigid, and I suppose it is human that I should try to imagine at times that I am at a disadvantage only because my virtues are more solid than his. They are not more solid; they are only more clumsy and less available."

"You don't spare yourself," said the professor.

"Why should I spare myself?" said Tredennis, knitting his brows. "After all, *he* never spares himself. He knows better.

He would be just to me. Why should I let him place me at a disadvantage again by being unjust to him? And why should we insist that the only good qualities are those which are unornamental? It is a popular fallacy. We like to believe it. It is very easy to suspect a man of being shallow because we are sure we are deep and he is unlike us. This Arbuthnot——"

"'This Arbuthnot,'" interposed the professor, with a smile. "It is curious enough to hear you entering upon a defence of 'this Arbuthnot.' You don't like him, Philip. You don't like him."

"I don't like myself," said Tredennis, "when I am compared with him—and I don't like the tendency I discover in myself—the tendency to disparage him. I should like to be fair to him, and I find it difficult."

"Upon my word," said the professor, "it is rather fine in you to make the effort, but"—giving him one of the old admiring looks—"you were always rather fine, Philip."

"It would be finer, sir," said Tredennis, colouring, "if it were not an effort."

"No," said the professor, quietly, "it would not be half so fine." And he put out his hand

and let it rest upon the arm of the chair in which Tredennis sat, and so it rested as long as their talk went on.

In the meantime Arbuthnot walked rather slowly down the street, quite conscious of finding it necessary to make something of an effort to compose himself. It was his recognition of this necessity which had caused him to change his first intention of returning to his bachelor apartment after having made his call upon Professor Herrick. And he felt the necessity all the more strongly after his brief encounter with Colonel Tredennis.

" I will go into the park and think it over," he said to himself. " I'll give myself time."

He turned into Lafayette Park, found a quiet seat, and took out a very excellent cigar. He was not entirely surprised to see that, as he held the match to it, his hand was not as steady as usual. Tredennis had thought him a little pale.

The subject of his reflections, as he smoked his cigar, was a comparatively trivial incident taken by itself, but he had not taken it by itself, because in a flash it had connected itself with a score of others, which at the times

of their occurring had borne no significance whatever to him.

His visit to the professor had not been made without reasons, but they had been such reasons as, simply stated to the majority of his ordinary acquaintance, would have been received with open amazement or polite discredit, and this principally because they were such very simple reasons indeed. If such persons had been told that, finding himself without any vestige of entertainment, he had wandered in upon the professor as a last resource, or that he had wished to ask of him some trivial favour—or that he had made his call without any reason whatever—they would have felt such a state of affairs probable enough, but being informed that while sitting in the easiest of chairs, in the coolest possible *négligé*, reading an agreeable piece of light literature, and smoking a cigar, before his open window, he had caught sight of the professor at *his* window, sitting with his head resting on his hand, and being struck vaguely by some air of desolateness and lassitude in the solitary old figure, had calmly laid aside book and cigar, had put himself into conventional attire, and had walked across the

street with no other intention than that of making the best of gifts of entertainment it was certainly not his habit to overvalue— those to whom the explanation had been made would have taken the liberty of feeling it somewhat insufficient, and would in nine cases out of ten privately have provided themselves with a more complicated one, cautiously insuring themselves against imposture by rejecting at the outset the simple and unvarnished truth.

Upon the whole the visit had been a success. On entering, it is true, he found himself called upon to admire the rapidity with which the professor recovered from his surprise at seeing him, but as he had not been deluded by any hope that his first appearance would awaken unmistakable delight, he managed to make the best of the situation. His opening remarks upon the subject of the weather were not altogether infelicitous, and then he produced his late number of *Punch*, and the professor laughed, and, the ice being broken, conversation flourished, and there was no further difficulty. He discovered, somewhat to his surprise, that he was in better conversational trim than usual.

"It is a delusive condition to be in," he explained to the professor, "but experience has taught me not to be taken in by it and expect future development. It won't continue —as you no doubt suspect. It is the result of entire social stagnation for several weeks. I am merely letting off all my fireworks at once—inspired to the improvidence by your presence. I am a poor creature, as you know, but even a poor creature is likely to suffer from an idea a day. The mental accumulations of this summer, carefully economised, will support me in penury during the entire ensuing season. I only conjure you not to betray me when you hear me repeat the same things by instalments at Mrs. Amory's evenings."

And saying it, he saw the professor's face change in some subtle way as he looked at him. What there was in this look and change to make him conscious of an inward start, he could not have told. It was the merest lifting of the lids, combined with an almost imperceptible movement of the muscles about the mouth, and yet he found it difficult to avoid pausing for a moment. But he accomplished the feat, and felt he had reason to be

rather proud of it. "Though what there is to startle him in my mention of Mrs. Amory's evenings," he reflected, "it would require an intellect to explain."

Being somewhat given to finding entertainment in quiet speculation upon passing events, he would doubtless have given some attention to the incident even if it had remained a solitary unexplained and mystifying trifle. But it was not left to stand alone in his mind.

It was not fifteen minutes before, in drawing his handkerchief from his breast-pocket, he accidentally drew forth with it a letter, which fell upon the newspaper lying upon the professor's lap, and for a moment rested there with the address upward.

And the instant he glanced from the pretty feminine envelope to the professor's face, Arbuthnot recognised the fact that something altogether unexpected had occurred again.

As he had looked from the envelope to the professor, so the professor looked from the envelope to him. Then he picked the letter up and returned it.

"It is a letter," Arbuthnot began,—"a letter——" and paused ignominiously.

"Yes," said the professor, as if he had lost something of his own gentle self-possession. "I see it is a letter."

It was not a happy remark, nor did Arbuthnot feel his own next effort a particularly successful one.

"It is a letter from Mrs. Amory," he said "She is kind enough to write to me occasionally."

"Yes," responded the professor. "I saw that it was from Bertha. Her hand is easily recognised."

"It is an unusual hand," said Arbuthnot. "And her letters are very like herself. When it occurs to her to remember me—which doesn't happen as frequently as I could wish—I consider myself fortunate. She writes as she talks, and very few people do that."

He ended with a greater degree of composure than he had begun with, but to his surprise he felt that his pulses had quickened and that there had risen to his face a touch of warmth suggestive of some increase of colour, and he did not enjoy the sensation. He began to open the letter.

"Shall I——" he said, and then suddenly stopped.

He knew why he had stopped, but the professor did not, and to make the pause and return the letter to its envelope and its place in his pocket without an explanation required something like hardihood.

"She is well, and seems to be taking advantage of the opportunity to rest," he said, and picked up his *Punch* again, returning to his half-finished comment upon its cartoon, as if no interruption had taken place.

As he sat on his seat in the park, apparently given up to undivided enjoyment of his cigar, his mind was filled with a tumult of thought. He had not been under the influence of such mental excitement for years. Suddenly he found himself confronting a revelation perfectly astounding to him.

"And so *I* am the man!" he said, at last. "*I* am the man!"

He took his cigar out of his mouth and looked at the end of it with an air of deliberate reflection, as is the masculine habit.

"It doesn't say much for me," he added, "that I never once suspected it—not once."

Then he replaced his cigar, with something like a sigh.

"We are a blind lot," he said.

He did not feel the situation a pleasant one; there were circumstances under which he would have resented it with a vigour and happy ingenuity of resource which would have stood him in good stead, but there was no resentment in his present mood. From the moment the truth had dawned upon him, he had treated it without even the most indirect reference to his own very natural feelings, and there had been more sacrifice of himself and his own peculiarities in his action when he had returned the letter to his pocket than even he himself realised.

"It was not the letter to show him," was his thought. "She does not know how much she tells me. He would have understood it as I do."

He went over a good deal of ground mentally as he sat in the deepening dusk, and he thought clearly and dispassionately, as was his habit when he allowed himself to think at all. By the time he had arrived at his conclusions, it was quite dark. Then he threw the end of his last cigar away and rose, and there was no denying that he was pale still, and wore a curiously intense expression.

"If there is one thing neither man nor

devil can put a stop to," he said, "it is an experience such as that. It will go on to one of two ends—it will kill her or she will kill it. The wider of the mark they shoot, the easier for her, and as for me," he added, with a rather faint and dreary smile, "perhaps it suits me well enough to be merely an alleviating circumstance. It's all I'm good for. Let them think as they please."

And he brushed an atom of cigar-ash from his sleeve with his rather too finely feminine hand, and walked away.

CHAPTER XVI.

A VAIN STRUGGLE.

HE paid the professor another visit a few days later, and afterwards another and another.

"What," said the professor, at the end of his second visit, "is it ten o'clock? I assure you it is usually much later than this when it strikes ten."

"Thank you," said Arbuthnot. "I never heard that civility accomplished so dexterously before. It is perfectly easy to explain the preternatural adroitness of speech on which Mrs. Amory prides herself. But don't be too kind to me, Professor, and weaken my resolution not to present myself unless I have just appropriated an idea from somewhere. If I should appear some day *au naturel*, not having taken the precaution to attire myself in the mature reflections of my acquaintance, I

shouldn't pay you for the wear and tear of seeing me, I'll confess beforehand."

"I once told you," said the professor to Tredennis, after the fourth visit, "that I was not fond of him, but there had been times when I had been threatened with it. This is one of the times. Ah!" with a sigh of fatigue, "I understand the attraction—I understand it."

The following week, Tredennis arrived at the house one evening to find it in some confusion. The *coupé* of a prominent medical man stood before the pavement, and the servant who opened the door looked agitated.

"The professor, sir," he said, "has had a fall. We hope he ain't much hurt, and Mr. Arbuthnot and the doctor is with him."

"Ask if I may go up stairs," said Tredennis, and, as he said it, Arbuthnot appeared on the landing above, and, seeing who was below, came down at once.

"There is no real cause for alarm," he said, "though he has had a shock. He had been out, and the heat must have been too much for him. As he was coming up the steps he felt giddy, and lost his footing and fell. Doctor Malcolm is with him, and says he

needs nothing but entire quiet. I am glad you have come. Did you receive my message?"

"No," answered Tredennis. "I have not been to my room."

"Come into the library," said Arbuthnot. "I have something to say to you."

He led the way into the room, and Tredennis followed him, wondering. When they got inside, Arbuthnot turned and closed the door.

"I suppose," he said, "you know no more certainly than I do where Mr. Amory is to be found." And as he spoke he took a telegram from his pocket.

"What is the matter?" demanded Tredennis. "What has——"

"This came almost immediately after the professor's accident," said Arbuthnot. "It is from Mrs. Amory, asking him to come to her. Janey is very ill."

"What!" exclaimed Tredennis. "And she alone, and probably without any physician she relies on!"

"Some one must go to her," said Arbuthnot, "and the professor must know nothing of it. If we knew of any woman friend of hers we

might appeal to her, but everybody is out of town."

He paused a second, his eyes fixed on Tredennis's changing face.

"If you will remain with the professor," he said, "I will go myself, and take Doctor Wentworth with me."

"You!" said Tredennis.

"I shall be better than nothing," replied Arbuthnot, quietly. "I can do what I am told to do, and she mustn't be left alone. If her mother had been alive, she would have gone,—if her father had been well, he would have gone,—if her husband had been here—"

"But he is not here," said Tredennis, with a bitterness not strictly just. "Heaven only knows where he is."

"It would be rather hazardous to trust to a telegram reaching him at Merrittsville," said Arbuthnot. "We are not going to leave her alone even until we have tried Merrittsville. What must be done must be done now. I will go and see Doctor Wentworth at once, and we can leave in an hour if I find him. You can tell the professor I was called away."

He made a step towards the door, and as he did so Tredennis turned suddenly.

"Wait a moment," he said.

Arbuthnot came back.

"What is it?" he asked.

There was a curious pause, which, though it lasted scarcely longer than a second, was still a pause.

"If *I* go," said Tredennis, "it will be easier to explain my absence to the professor." And then there was a pause again, and each man looked at the other, and each was a trifle pale.

It was Arbuthnot who spoke first.

"I think," he said, without moving a muscle, "that you had better let me go."

"Why?" said Tredennis, and the unnatural quality of his voice startled himself.

"Because," said Arbuthnot, as calmly as before, "you will be conferring a favour on me, if you do. I want an excuse for getting out of town and—I want an opportunity to be of some slight service to Mrs. Amory."

Before the dignity of the stalwart figure towering above his slighter proportions, he knew he appeared to no advantage as he said the words, but to have made the best of himself he must have relinquished his point at the outset, and this he had no intention of doing, though he was not enjoying himself.

A certain cold-blooded pertinacity which he had acquired after many battles with himself was very useful to him at the moment.

"The worst thing that could happen to her just now," he had said to himself, ten minutes before, "would be that he should go to her in her trouble." And upon this conviction he took his stand.

In placing himself in the breach, he knew that he had no means of defence whatever—that any reasons for his course he might offer must appear, by their flimsiness, to betray in him entire inadequacy to the situation in which he seemed to stand, and that he must present himself in the character of a victim to his own bold but shallow devices, and simply brazen the matter out; and when one reflects upon human weakness, it is certainly not to his discredit that he had calmly resigned himself to this before entering the room. There was no triviality in Tredennis's mood, and he made no pretence of any. The half-darkness of the room, which had been shaded from the sun during the day, added to the significance of every line in his face. As he stood with folded arms, the shadows seemed to make him look larger, to mark

his pallor, and deepen the intensity of his expression.

"Give me a better reason," he said.

Arbuthnot paused. What he saw in the man moved him strongly. In the light of that past of his, which was a mystery to his friends, he often saw with terrible clearness much he was not suspected of seeing at all, and here he recognised what awakened in him both pity and respect.

"I have no better one," he answered. "I tell you I miss the exhilaration of Mrs. Amory's society, and want to see her, and hope she will not be sorry to see me." And having said it, he paused again before making his *coup d'état*. Then he spoke deliberately, looking Tredennis in the eyes. "That you should think anything detrimental to Mrs. Amory, even in the most shadowy way, is out of the question," he said. "Think of me what you please."

"I shall think nothing that is detrimental of any man who is her friend," said Tredennis, and there was passion in the words, though he had tried to repress it.

"Her friendship would be a good defence for a man against any wrong that was in

him," said Arbuthnot, and this time the sudden stir of feeling in him was not altogether concealed. "Let me have my way," he ended. "It will do no harm."

"It will do no good," said Tredennis.

"No," answered Arbuthnot, recovering his impervious air, "it will do no good, but one has to be sanguine to expect good. Perhaps I need pity," he added. "Suppose you are generous and show it me."

He could not help seeing the dramatic side of the situation, and with half-conscious irony abandoning himself to it. All at once he seemed to have deserted the well-regulated and decently arranged commonplaces of his ordinary life, and to be taking part in a theatrical performance of rather fine and subtle quality, and he waited with intense interest to see what Tredennis would do.

What he did was characteristic of him. He had unconsciously taken two or three hurried steps across the room, and he turned and stood still.

"It is I who must go," he said.

"You are sure of that?" said Arbuthnot.

"We have never found it easy to understand each other," Tredennis answered,

"though perhaps you have understood me better than I have understood you. You are quicker and more subtle than I am. I only seem able to see one thing at a time, and do one thing. I only see one thing now. It is better that I should go."

"You mean," said Arbuthnot, "better for me?"

Tredennis looked down at the floor.

"Yes," he answered.

A second or so of silence followed, in which Arbuthnot simply stood and looked at him. The utter uselessness of the effort he had made was borne in upon him in a manner which overpowered him.

"Then," he remarked at length, "if you are considering me, there seems nothing more to be said. Will you go and tell the professor that you are called away, or shall I?"

"I will go myself," replied Tredennis.

He turned to leave the room, and Arbuthnot walked slowly towards the window. The next moment Tredennis turned from the door and followed him.

"If I have ever done you injustice," he said, "the time is past for it, and I ask your pardon."

"Perhaps it is not justice I need," said Arbuthnot, "but mercy—and I don't think you have ever been unjust to me. It wouldn't have been easy."

"In my place," said Tredennis, with a visible effort, "you would find it easier than I do to say what you wished. I——"

"You mean that you pity me," Arbuthnot interposed. "As I said before, perhaps I need pity. Sometimes I think I do," and the slight touch of dreariness in his tone echoed in Tredennis's ear long after he had left him and gone on his way.

CHAPTER XVII.

IN THE MOONLIGHT.

It was ten o'clock and bright moonlight when Tredennis reached his destination—the train having brought him to a wayside station two miles distant, where he had hired a horse and struck out into the county road. In those good old days when the dwelling of every Virginia gentleman was his "mansion," the substantial pile of red brick before whose gateway he dismounted had been a mansion too, and had not been disposed to trifle with its title, but had insisted upon it with a dignified squareness which scorned all architectural devices to attract attention. Its first owner had chosen its site with a view to the young "shade-trees" upon it, and while he had lived upon his property had been almost as proud of

his trees as of his "mansion"; and when, long afterwards, changes had taken place, and the objects of his pride fell into degenerate hands, as the glories of the mansion faded, its old friends the trees grew and flourished, and seemed to close kindly in about it, as if to soften and shadow its decay.

On each side of the drive which led down to the gate-way, grew an irregular line of these trees, here and there shading the way from side to side, and again leaving a spacc for the moonlight to stream upon. As he tied his horse, Tredennis glanced up this drive-way towards the house.

"There is a light burning in one of the rooms," he said. "It must be there that——" He broke off in the midst of a sentence, his attention suddenly attracted by a figure which flitted across one of the patches of moonlight.

He knew it at once, though he had had no thought of seeing it before entering the house. It was Bertha, in a white dress and with two large dogs following her, leaping and panting when she spoke in a hushed voice, as if to quiet them.

She came down towards the gate with a

light, hurried tread, and, when she was within a few feet of it, spoke.

"Doctor," she said, "oh, how glad I am—how glad!" and, as she said it, came out into the broad moonlight again and found herself face to face with Tredennis.

She fell back from him as if a blow had been struck her—fell back trembling, and as white as the moonlight itself.

"What!" she cried, "is it *you—you?*

He looked at her, bewildered by the shock his presence seemed to her.

"I did not think I should frighten you," he said. "I came to-night because the professor was not well enough to make the journey. Doctor Wentworth will be here in the morning. He would have come with me, but he had an important case to attend."

"I did not think *you* would come," she said, breathlessly, and put out her hand, groping for the support of the swinging gate, which she caught and held.

"There was no one else," he answered.

He felt as if he were part of some strange dream. The stillness, the moonlight, the heavy shadows of the great trees, all added to the unreality of the moment; but most unreal

of all was Bertha herself, clinging with one rembling hand to the gate, and looking up at him with dilated eyes.

"I did not think *you* would come," she said again, "and it startled me—and——" She paused with a poor little effort at a smile, which the next instant died away. "Don't—don't look at me!" she said, and, turning away from him, laid her face on the hand clinging to the gate.

He looked down at her slight white figure and bent head, and a great tremor passed over him. The next instant she felt him standing close at her side.

"You must not—do that," he said, and put out his hand and touched her shoulder.

His voice was almost a whisper—he was scarcely conscious of what his words were—he had scarcely any consciousness of his touch. The feeling which swept over him needed no sense of touch or sound—the one thing which overpowered him was his sudden sense of a nearness to her which was not physical nearness at all.

"Perhaps I was wrong to come," he went on; "but I could not leave you alone—I could not leave you alone. I knew that

you were suffering, and I could not bear that."

She did not speak or lift her head.

"Has it been desolate?" he asked.

"Yes," she answered, in a hushed voice.

"I was afraid so," he said. "You have been alone so long—I have thought of it almost every hour of the day; you are not used to being alone. Perhaps it was a mistake. Why do you tremble so?"

"I don't know," she answered.

"My poor child!" he said. "My poor child!" And then there was a pause which seemed to hold a life-time of utter silence.

It was Bertha who ended it. She stirred a little, and then lifted her face. She looked as he remembered her looking when he had first known her—only that she was paler, and there was a wearied softness in her eyes. She made no attempt at hiding the traces of tears in them, and she spoke as simply as a child.

"I thought it was the doctor, when I heard the horse's feet," she said; "and I was afraid the dogs would bark and waken Janey. She has just fallen asleep, and she has slept so little. She has been very ill."

"*You* have not slept," he said.

"No," she replied. "This is the first time I have left her."

He took her hand and drew it gently through his arm.

"I will take you up to the house," he said, "so that you can hear every sound; but you must stay outside for a little while. The fresh air will do you good, and we can walk up and down while I tell you the reason the professor did not come."

All the ordinary conventional barriers had fallen away from between them. He did not know why or how, and he did not ask. Suddenly he found himself once again side by side with the Bertha he had fancied lost for ever. All that had bewildered him was gone. The brilliant little figure with its tinkling ornaments, the unemotional little smile, the light laugh, were only parts of a feverish dream. It was Bertha whose hand rested on his arm—whose fair young face was pale with watching over her child—whose soft voice was tremulous and tender with innocent, natural tears. She spoke very little. When they had walked to and fro before the house for a short time, she said:

"Let us go and sit down on the steps of the porch," and they went and sat there together

—he upon a lower step and she a few steps above, her hands clasped on her knee, her face turned half away from him. She rarely looked at him, he noticed, even when he spoke to her or she spoke to him; her eyes rested oftener than not upon some far-away point under the trees.

"You are no better than you were when you went away," he said, looking at her cheek where the moonlight whitened it.

"No," she answered.

"I did not think to find you looking like this," he said.

"Perhaps," she said, still with her eyes fixed on the far-away shadows, "perhaps I have not had time enough. You must give me time."

"You have had two months," he returned.

"Two months," she said, "is not so long as it seems." And between the words there came a curious little catch of the breath.

"It has seemed long to you?" he asked.

"Yes."

She turned her face slowly and looked at him.

"Has it seemed long to you?" she said.

"Yes," he replied, "long and dreary."

She swayed a little towards him with a sort

of unconscious movement; her eyes were fixed upon his face with a wistful questioning; he had seen her look at her children so.

"Was it very hot?" she said. "Were you tired? Why did you not go away?"

"I did not want to go away," he answered.

"But you ought to have gone away," she said. "You were not used to the heat, and —— Let the light fall on your face so that I can see it!"

He came a little nearer to her, and as she looked at him the wistfulness in her eyes changed to something else.

"Oh," she cried, "it has done you harm. Your face is quite changed. Why didn't I see it before? What have you been doing?"

"Nothing," he answered.

He did not stir, or want to stir, but sat almost breathlessly still, watching her, the sudden soft anxiousness in her eyes setting every pulse in his body throbbing.

"Oh," she said, "you are ill—you are ill! How could you be so careless? Why did not papa ——"

She faltered—her voice fell and broke. She even drew back a little, though her eyes still rested upon his.

"You were angry with me when you thought I did not take care of myself," she said; "and you have been as bad as I was, and worse. You had not so many temptations." And she turned away, and he found himself looking only at her cheek again, and the soft side-curve of her mouth.

"There is less reason why I should take care of myself," he said.

"You mean"—she asked, without moving—"that there are fewer people who would miss you?"

"I do not know of any one who would miss me."

Her hands stirred slightly, as they lay in her lap.

"That is underrating your friends," she said, slowly. "But"—altering her tone—"it is true, I have the children and Richard."

"Where is Richard?" he asked.

"I don't know."

"When you heard from him last," he began.

"He is a bad correspondent," she said. "He always finds so much to fill his time when he is away. There is an understanding between us that he shall write very few letters. I am responsible for it myself, because

I know it spoils everything for him when he has an unwritten letter on his conscience. I haven't heard from him first yet since he went West."

She rose from her seat on the step.

"I will go in now," she said. "I must speak to Mrs. Lucas about giving you a room, and then I will go to Janey. She is sleeping very well."

He rose, too, and stood below her, looking up.

"You must promise not to think of me," he said. "I did not come here to be considered. Do you think an old soldier, who has slept under the open sky many a night, cannot provide for himself?"

"Have you slept so often?" she asked, the very triviality of the question giving it a strange sweetness to his ears.

"Yes," he answered. "And often with no surety of wakening with my scalp on."

"Oh!" she exclaimed, and made an involuntary movement towards him.

He barely restrained his impulse to put out his hands, but hers fell at her sides the next instant.

"I am a great coward," she said. "It fills

me with terror to hear of things like that. Is it at all likely that you will be ordered back?"

"I don't know," he replied, his uplifted eyes devouring all the sweetness of her face. "Would that ——"

The very madness of the question forming itself on his lips was its own check.

"I don't want to think of it," he said. Then he added, "As I stand here I look up at you. I never looked up at you before."

"Nor I down at you," she returned. "You are always so high above me. It seems strange to look down at you."

It was all so simple and inconsequent, but every word seemed full of the mystery and emotion of the hour. When he tried afterwards to recall what they had said, he was bewildered by the slightness of what had been uttered, even though the thrill of it had not yet passed away.

He went up the steps and stood beside her.

"Yes," he said, speaking as gently as he might have spoken to a child. "You make me feel what a heavy-limbed, clumsy fellow I am. All women make me feel it, but you

more than all the rest. You look almost like a child."

"But I am not very little," she said; "it is only because I am standing near you."

"I always think of you as a small creature," he said. "I used to think, long ago, that some one should care for you."

"You were very good, long ago," she answered softly. "And you are very good now to have come to try to help me. Will you come in?"

"No," he said, "not now. It might only excite the child to-night if she saw me, and so long as she is quiet, I will not run the risk of disturbing her. I will tell you what I am going to do. I am not going to leave you alone. I shall walk up and down beneath your window, and if you need me you will know I am there, and you have only to speak in your lowest voice. If she should be worse, my horse is at the gate, and I can go for the doctor at once."

She looked up at him with a kind of wonder.

"Do you mean that you intend to stand sentinel all night?" she said.

"I have stood sentinel before," was his

reply. "I came to stand sentinel. All that I can do is to be ready if I am wanted."

"But I cannot let you stay up all night," she began.

"You said it had been desolate," he answered. "Won't it be less desolate to know that—that some one is near you?"

"Oh, yes! Oh, yes!" she said. "But——"

"Go up stairs," he said, "and promise me that, if she still sleeps, you will lie down and let your nurse watch her."

The gentle authority of his manner seemed to impress her curiously. She hesitated as if she scarcely understood it.

"I—don't—know," she faltered.

"You will be better for it to-morrow," he persisted, "and so will she."

"I never did such a thing before," she said, slowly.

"I sha be beneath the open window," he said, "and I have the ears of an Indian. I shall know if she stirs."

She drew a soft, troubled breath.

"Well," she said, "I will—go."

And, without another word, she turned away. He stood and watched her as she moved slowly across the wide porch. At

the door she stopped and turned towards him.

"But," she said, faint lines showing themselves on her forehead, "I shall be remembering that you—are not asleep."

"You must not remember me at all," he answered.

And then he stood still and watched her again until she had entered the house and noiselessly ascended the staircase, which was a few yards from the open door, and then, when he could see her white figure in the darkness no more, he went out to his place beneath the window, and strode silently to and fro, keeping watch and listening until after the moon had gone down and the birds were beginning to stir in the trees.

END OF VOL. I.

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